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Lady Augusta Catherine De la Pasture Clifford.

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THE
MAN FROM AMERICA

A SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

BY

MRS. HENRY DE LA PASTURE

AUTHOR OF

"DEBORAH OF TOD'S," "ADAM GRIGSON," "A TOY TRAGEDY,"
"CATHERINE OF CALAIS," "CORNELIUS,"
"PETER'S MOTHER," ETC.

"Oh Time! . . .
. . . When thou hast dried the bitter tear,
That flows in vain o'er all my life held dear,
I may look back on many a sorrow past,
And greet Life's peaceful evening with a smile."

W. L. BOWLES.

LONDON
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1905

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"How blest is he who crowns, in shades like these,
A youth of labour with an age of ease!
. . . And all his prospects bright'ning at the last,
His heaven commences ere the world be past!"

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

THE MAN FROM AMERICA

CHAPTER I

HONEYCOTT MANOR lay on the sunny side of the Cullaway hills, near the village of Luscombe, and midway between the small but ancient towns of Remberton in Somerset and Domaford in Devon.

The old homestead stood within the shelter of cob-built walls, mended here and there with brick, and washed a yellowish pink; house and walls alike were heavily thatched, and covered with carefully trained peach and plum trees.

In this quiet retreat lived the Vicomte de Nauroy, who had been christened Patrick, and whose family name was O'Reilly.

Just within his front door hung the Vicomte's pedigree, framed and surmounted by a tiny gilded French coronet.

This document, ornamented by an official seal, stated that Patrick O'Reilly was the son of the brave Chevalier O'Reilly, a naturalized Frenchman, and a soldier of fortune. It also declared that the said Patrick was descended from the ancient Kings of Ireland; that he had earned the gratitude of France for heroic gallantry in Algeria, where he had been several times wounded, and twice decorated; and, finally, that for distinguished services nearer home, Louis-Philippe had bestowed a title of nobility upon him in the year of grace 1847, shortly before his Majesty had seen fit to retire from his own exalted position.

The Vicomte's present dwelling-place was scarcely more than a cottage, and, owing to the hollow of the fertile hill wherein it lay, no man overlooked it. Also it had this peculiarity, that there was no back entrance, nor any opening at all towards the north. Doors and windows alike faced due south, and the sunny old-fashioned garden was reckoned a fortnight earlier than any other in those parts, so unusually favoured was its situation.

There were two doors in the high walls which enclosed it; one led straight into the deeply sunken lane below, and the other was a private side-entrance into the big kitchen garden of Southerleigh Court, where lived George Trethewy, the Vicomte's son-in-law, with his two motherless little girls.

The Trethewys were the original owners of Honeycott; of the little old manor-house itself, and the whole of the surrounding hamlet of Southerleigh; but they had long ago abandoned the thatched roof, which had sheltered their ancestors for so many generations, and built themselves a finer residence.

The doubts which had been expressed in hamlet and village a hundred years since, as to whether the family fortunes could stand the strain of such superior gentility, had been resolved by time into the certainty that they could not, for the late squire had been obliged to sell a portion of his property, and the present owner had mortgaged the remaining acres.

Mr. George Trethewy cared little for farming; he let his land, lived at his ease, and indulged a taste for travelling, which he had acquired in early youth; when, being exceedingly delicate, and threatened with consumption, he had been obliged to winter abroad.

During a prolonged stay in Paris, he fell in love with the Vicomte de Nauroy's pretty daughter. Mademoiselle

Rosalie returned his passion, and, since she was the only child of an elderly widowed father, who could refuse her nothing, she obtained permission to accept her English lover.

The Vicomte's military career had come to a close more than twenty years earlier ; partly owing to the departure of Louis-Philippe, and partly to his own disablement from a wound, which had resulted in a slight but incurable lameness.

He had a passion for science, and as a young man had studied chemistry, with a view to entering the medical profession ; but martial ardour had caused him to embrace a different calling. His studies now stood him in good stead, for his services to his country were rewarded by a civil appointment in which he could turn them to good account.

He was already past sixty years old, and had held the post of *Directeur des Laboratoires au Ministère des Finances* for many years, when his daughter married George Trethewy, in the year 1870. The young squire, in facing the prospect of marriage, had been obliged to face also his financial position, and became dismally aware of the full extent of the ravage wrought by his reckless extravagance and carelessness.

The Vicomte came to the rescue ; paid his debts, freed his estates, bestowed a dowry upon his daughter which comprised the greater part of his remaining fortune, and finding himself unable to live without her, followed the young couple to England, and settled down at their very gates.

George Trethewy and his bride took up their residence at Southerleigh Court, and their short married life was full of happiness.

She was too young, and he too fond, for any regrets to arise during those brief and blissful years. She was

enchanted with her romantic home among the fertile hills of Devon; she planned gardens, planted rosaries, and built fountains and arbours.

By force of her own joyous youth and radiant spirits, she created a little paradise around her, wherein her yellow-haired, blue-eyed husband moved and had his being, crowned, in her eyes, with the sacred halo of first love; though he was, in reality, but an idle and capricious youth, feeble of character as of constitution.

In the third year of her marriage, when her second babe was born, Rosalie Trethewy died in child-bed.

Perhaps in the midst of his grief the Vicomte remembered to be glad that his impetuous daughter had not outlived the illusion of perfect happiness; nor discovered the clay feet of her idol, which were but too apparent to a looker-on.

He was grateful to the son-in-law whom he had never loved, when he reflected that Rosalie owed to George Trethewy a happiness which many who live to be old have never experienced.

She had been so absorbed in her bliss that her father felt as though she were almost nearer to him now than she had been at any time since her marriage.

His child slept in the shadow of the village church at Luscombe, but her soft embraces were his once more, when he held her baby Kitty in his arms. Her ardent spirit looked at him through the dark eyes of the little Rosaleen. Her very laugh rang out when the children played together on the daisied lawn.

So often had Pélagie, the old nurse, related the mournful story to the little sisters, that the seven-year-old Rosaleen had grown almost to believe that she remembered the chill dawn of that February morning, when the weeping Frenchwoman had run trembling, through a white world wrapt

in silence and mist and hoar-frost, to summon her old master to his daughter's death-bed.

She had run out into the wintry cold, in her frightened haste, with the sixteen-months-old Rosaleen in her arms; and was only reminded of her imprudence when the child suddenly raised its sleepy voice in a weak but distinct imitation of a tune whistled by a labourer trudging early to his work down the lane. Pélagie, in the midst of her alarm, had time to be astounded by her nursling's precocity.

The picture as she had described it was so vivid that Rosaleen saw it all quite as plainly as Pélagie; the frosted garden, the hills lost in damp white fog; the stillness, and the little surprised babe lifting up its head from its nurse's shoulder to listen to the labourer's song.

The servants at the Court had never been fond of the Vicomte; they had mocked among themselves at his oddity, his corpulency, and his grand manner, combined with his frugality of living. But they were sorry for him as he came stumbling up the stair in his flowing *déshabille*, and they looked respectfully away from the distracted father, whose blue eyes were wild with grief and terror.

They had no interest in his past, nor imagination to conjecture its varied fortunes, indicated by that emblazoned record at Honeycott; but they sympathized according to their lights, with the sorrow that they could see and understand.

For them he was, as he now pathetically said of himself, only a grandfather.

He had outlived many reverses, and much sorrow; but the endearing jollity of his smile, the humorous twinkle of his blue eyes, and the warmth of his heart, sufficiently declared that the most charming characteristics of his race had survived both his own misfortunes and the naturalization of his parents.

"Papa is Frenchman only in Devonshire," Rosalie had been wont to say, in her pretty broken English. "In Paris he is of Ireland, and so am I, and he likes only the songs his mother knew."

So she thrummed her little French guitar, and sang Irish melodies in the Devonshire garden, and named her nut-brown babe after the "dark Rosaleen" of her song.

The echoes of her music haunted the garden yet, so far as old Patrick was concerned. He lived so solitary a life that the past and present had become almost one to him, and time fled over his whitened head unheeded.

In person the Vicomte was of immense size, and his bushy eyebrows, and fierce white moustache and imperial, gave him a military appearance.

In spite of his corpulency and his lameness, he moved with something like the elegant shuffle of a dancing-master. But the politeness of his manner, combined with a perfect simplicity, suggested, nevertheless, the foreigner of distinction.

He dressed more with a view to comfort than with any idea of troubling to follow the fashion.

His baggy trousers were of brown holland in summer, and strangely patterned wool in winter, when he placidly wrapped a plain shawl over his shoulders and spread the ends over his knees to keep out the cold.

In all seasons he affected a yellow linen waistcoat, which he wore unbuttoned across the lower chest. His socks were beautifully embroidered, and his heelless shoes were polished by his own hands.

His old servant, Jacques, had died in his arms, and for love of him, the Vicomte would keep no other. He trained a village lad to work under him in the garden, fetch and carry, and look after the horse and cart. His housekeeper,

Pélagie, had become nurse to Rosalie's babes. She had wept a little, but not much, when she left him. She was no longer young enough, as she truly said, for emotion.

She too had grown stout on unlimited sweet cider and scalded cream during her residence at Southerleigh. Nevertheless, she found time to wend her way daily across the *jardin potager* to M. le Vicomte's habitation; waddling behind her charges if the paths were dry, or composedly carrying one child like a bundle beneath each arm, if the weather were unfavourable for walking.

It was a consolation to Pélagie to escape from the observation of the English servants at the Court; though these were but simple Devon rustics, who thought none the worse of her for her excessive industry. But she liked to work in her own way. She washed and ironed her old master's linen, scrubbed his red-tiled floor, and scoured his copper saucepans.

M. le Vicomte was not proud. During the winter months he sat habitually in the kitchen, which was the warmest as well as the largest room in the house.

Here he made the coffee for what he called his "five o'clocq" with his own hand, and Pélagie baked the *quatre-quarts*, or *petits fours*, which made tea *chez bon papa* so much more agreeable than even the chudleighs and cream and jam in the nursery at home.

In the summer old Patrick would occupy the porch, or an armchair on the lawn, according to the weather, and there he would sit, smoking endless cigarettes, whilst his grandchildren generously presented him with flowers pulled from his own borders, or climbed on to his immense knee and commented upon the pattern of his waistcoat, the seals on his watch-chain, and the yellow stains of nicotine which decorated the tips of his fingers and of his white moustache.

He appeared to enjoy very tranquilly every moment of

his existence; he fed his cats and his doves, pruned his fruit-trees, budded his roses, and cooked his meals in a manner always dainty and leisurely, but thoroughly skilful.

He took no exercise, seldom put so much as the tip of his nose out-of-doors in bad weather, and slept all the year round with his bedroom windows hermetically sealed in true French fashion. To these habits he attributed the preservation of his excellent health.

But Pélagie was peasant born, and took no such precautions as regarded her charges, who lived in the open air, and were perfectly well, merry, and rosy. Their grandfather viewed with delight the red flush of health on the brown cheeks of Rosaleen, and the clear blue eyes and exquisite colour of little Kitty.

The sunken lane which skirted the bottom of the Vicomte's garden wound its way behind Southerleigh Court, dividing the pleasure grounds from the kitchen garden, which was laid out upon the higher level of the hill.

The lane was overshadowed by trees and shrubs on the one side, and by a great ivy-covered rampart supporting the kitchen garden on the other.

Little hands pulled resolutely at the barred iron gates that faced the exit from the shrubbery, and little feet climbed the worn, cracked stone steps that led to the *potager*, now gay and sweet with the sunshine and blossom of May.

Rosaleen was imaginative, and never mounted the winding stairway between the frowning walls of masonry without a sensation of fear, though she was fascinated too by the variety of plants which thrust themselves through every cavity and chink of the stones: from the pennywort, which served for plates at dolls' feasts, to the dandelions, which supplied drops of milk for the same purpose.

"How did Weston plant them so high in the stone?" Kitty asked; and Rosaleen replied solemnly—

"This is not Weston's garden. God planted these. He likes best what Weston calls weeds, and so do I."

"How do you know Dod likes weeds best?" said Kitty, respectfully.

"Because He plants them everywhere in the night when Weston isn't looking, that's why," said Rosaleen, calmly.

On either side of the corner stones, at the top of the stair in the wall, stood bushes of sweet lavender, and clumps of wallflower scented the air, above the carpet of golden thyme which crept along the border and hung over the stone steps.

The thatched roof of Honeycott appeared above the far wall at the end of the kitchen garden, backed by a tall fir-tree; here the Vicomte's turtle doves, Roméo et Juliette, sat among the dark branches, and called softly and incessantly to each other. Beyond the cottage a tall, late pear tree, yet white with bloom, thrust itself between the brown eaves and the misty blue distance of the hills beyond.

"Why is the moon so faded in the afternoon?" asked Kitty, pointing with a fat forefinger to the cloudless sky.

"You can't expect it to shine day *and* night, child," said her sapient elder; and she hammered joyfully at the door in the west wall.

"Bon papa, bon papa, ou-es-tu donc?"

"I come, my cabbage," roared the Vicomte's stentorian tones. A shuffling step was followed by the unbolting of the door.

Golden head and brown head alike were folded in a mighty embrace against the yellow waistcoat.

"Is it a tea-party, grandpapa?" cried Kitty, hastily disengaging herself from his arms, to gaze in rapture at the well-known preparations for a coming feast on the lawn.

"It is a tea-party, for there is Odo," said Rosaleen; "and it is always a tea-party when Odo comes."

"Or there wouldn't be enough to eat," said Kitty, innocently.

A podgy little boy, with an angry gleam in his black eyes, was being held prisoner in the lower doorway by his nurse, who was endeavouring to straighten his collar and smooth his long curls.

He was fantastically dressed in a velvet suit with a Vandyke collar of lace; but his cross little face and pallid fat cheeks were smeared with mud, and his dainty clothes bore obvious traces of an honest effort to climb a red earth bank.

"You can go now," he shouted to his attendant, "and you needn't come back for me either. I can find my way home quite well."

"Oh, Master Odo, there's a likely story! I shall come for you as usual, and I hope you'll be a good boy."

The respectable nurse, in her black silk dress and neat bonnet, advanced gravely up the garden path, resisting every attempt of her indignant charge to free himself from her authoritative grasp, until she had placed him, as it were, in the direct custody of his host.

"His mamma hoped, sir, as you would be kind enough not to let him out of your sight for a moment. She never knows no peace while he's away, he's that mischievous; and the carriage will be sent for him at six, sir, if that will not be leaving him too long."

Odo watched the closing of the green door behind his nurse's back with unfeigned joy. To express at once his mingled feelings of relief and emancipation, he threw himself upon the daisied slope of the lawn, and rolled from the top to the bottom of the little garden, before greeting his expectant playmates.

"Thy manners are bad, Odo, but I pardon thee," murmured the old gentleman. He smiled indulgently upon the trio, who presently sat down among the daisies and buttercups with their heads very close together, to examine a treasure produced from Odo's velvet pocket, which he had done his best to guard from injury during his ecstatic roll. The Vicomte stole up with his slippered feet, peeped at the mystery, and retired chuckling.

It was not Odo's new gold watch which he was proudly displaying to his delighted playmates, nor any other of the costly presents he had received on his recent birthday; but a wretched, gasping, green frog, which he had caught for himself, and wrapped unperceived in his best silk neckerchief, after thoughtfully soaking the same in his water-jug.

Odo was permitted not infrequently to grace the Vicomte's "five o'clocq" at Honeycott, although he was a boy, and although it was a well-known fact that *bon papa* only tolerated boys when they were exceptionally humble and well-behaved; also that he had the oddest notions that girls were more important, even though they were younger.

Odo was a very important person indeed at home, where he behaved much as he chose, being the only child of his parents, and the heir of Monksbere.

But at Honeycott old Patrick glared at him like a tiger if he did but help himself to a single cake before the others were served; and on one occasion, when the young gentleman playfully upset Kitty out of her chair, her grandpapa boxed his ears without ceremony.

Odo was encouraged to complain to his mamma when life went hardly with him, but somehow he omitted to tell any tales of the hearty buffeting he received from his friend the Vicomte. He had to eat humble pie, a dish he much disliked, and apologize to the astonished Kitty, before he

was again admitted to partake of Pélagie's chocolate *éclairs* and *babas-au-rhum*.

His politeness within the precincts of Honeycott became exemplary after this lesson.

To the surprise of Mr. Gregory Copp, M.P., his papa; and of the entire household at Monksbere, he preferred the entertainments of M. de Nauroy to any pleasure that the united efforts of his parents and his tutor could devise for him. Perhaps because none of his attendants were allowed to follow him to Honeycott, where he was entrusted reluctantly to the Vicomte's charge, and to the companionship of Rosaleen and Kitty.

To their sympathetic ears alone did Odo confide the misery and shame caused him by his long curls and his picturesque jackets; besides his indignation on account of his mamma's refusal to send him to school, where, as he loftily remarked, a fellow who was nearly nine ought to have been sent long ago, with short hair; so that his cousin Conrade, when he came back for the holidays, could no longer pull his long curls, and taunt him with being a stay-at-home, and a baby.

Rosaleen and Kitty wept when Odo darkly hinted that one day his curls would be found on his pillow, cut off with his father's razor, whilst the head that had unwillingly borne them would be hiding itself in a seaman's hammock on board a man-of-war, far away from tutors, nurses, and velvet jackets. They admired Odo, even while they implored him to relent. But they admired his cousin Conrade yet more. Conrade looked down upon them from a great height, being nearly twelve years old, and big and strong for his age. He had once pulled Kitty out of the fountain into which she had fallen at Southerleigh; and once dropped her on to the gravel path and sprained her ankle, whilst good-naturedly treating her to a ride on his shoulder.

Conrade's company on the whole, though exciting, usually led to disaster and disgrace, and Odo preferred coming to tea with Rosaleen and Kitty when his adventurous cousin was safe at school.

Just now the trio were interested only in the revival of the hapless frog; dipping him into the watering-can and hastily constructing a shady retreat for him in a flower-pot.

The Vicomte, moving to and fro in his leisurely manner, prepared the coming feast for his little guests, aided by the breathless Pélagie, who arrived late, brimming over with voluble apologies and excuses.

Yet another visitor was on the way to the tea-party at Honeycott; but of this fact the Vicomte was unaware.

CHAPTER II

A YOUNG man in a plain grey suit, with a knapsack on his shoulders, and a stout cane in his hand, stopped at the four cross-roads and read the directions on the signpost.

He had already climbed the steep main road from Remberton over the Cullaway hills; now it dipped into the valley before him, and in the distance wound its way upwards again through the Monksbere woods.

To Domaford, 7 miles, read the signpost.

On his right, a lane—deeply sunken, and full of red mud, banked with ferns and shaded by undergrown oaks—led to the insignificant village of Luscombe.

On his left, a wooden arm pointed down a yet narrower and muddier lane.

To Southerleigh, ½ mile.

The young man paused, reflected, and then seated himself very deliberately on a fallen log by the roadside, in the shade of a beech.

"I guess I'll wait till somebody comes along before I prospect any further," he said, half aloud.

The heat of the May day was excessive; he had climbed a very long and steep hill; the rest and shade were alluring. He took off his cap and wiped his forehead, looking round with pleasant approval at the peaceful scene, lit by the long rays of the afternoon sun.

The hedgerows were glowing with wild natural posies; a few primroses lingered yet beneath the shade of the

luxuriant ferns; scented white violets clustered round the harts-tongue which fringed the road.

Through the opposite gateway cut in the high bank, he could see the red Devon cattle browsing in the rich meadows, now sheeted with yellow buttercups.

The oaks in the hedgerows were uncrumbling their belated leaves, which shone as transparent gold in the sunlight. The elms, lopped of their lower branches, towered above the oaks, bearing their burden of light green foliage against the misty blue-grey of the distance.

Half buried in the spring growth, he observed a wooden box in the hedge, fastened to a staple, and ornamented by a slit evidently intended for letters.

"They must be a primitive folk hereabouts," thought the young man, "to trust their letters to the high-road, that way."

Before his enjoyment of rest and observation had palled, he heard the sound of cart and horse, and a mighty son of Devon presently emerged from the Luscombe lane, leading an elephantine black mare. He stopped short when he perceived that somebody wanted to speak to him, and his cart completely blocked the entrance to the lane, the hub of the wheels touching either bank.

"Does M. le Vicomte de Nauroy live hereabouts?" asked the young man, wasting a perfect French accent on his uncomprehending auditor.

The carter paused, looked with good-humoured interest at the speaker, and shook his head slowly.

"Whum wuddee be bleeze to zay, zur?"

The young man repeated his question more distinctly.

A look of intelligence spread over the yeoman's stolidly handsome face.

"You du be meaning ole Pat, as us du carl 'un. They

vurrin names be tu vine var we, and 'un be zo English as yume me, var that matter."

"Well—I'm an American," said the young man.

"Lard, du'ee zay zo?" said the carter, rather admiringly. "My zister's got a darter married and gone tu 'Merrikey."

"Is that so?" said the young man, gravely.

"Yu may depend on't her be. I was tu her wedding. Ole Pat, 'ee gived she a vine present, tho' her had nart tu du wi' 'un, and lived over tu Luscombe."

He pronounced the *combe* in native fashion, with soft long-drawn *u;* and smiled amiably as he noticed his auditor's attention to his drawling speech.

"Where does the old gentleman live, anyway?" said the American.

He showed no sign of impatience. His manner was perfectly calm and deliberate, and his face might almost have been termed expressionless. But the lack of expression was purposeful and not involuntary, the grey eyes were alert and watchful.

He was quite young, hardly more than one and twenty, which made his self-possession the more obvious; of middle height, spare, and active.

The Devonian's black head towered above him, but in his bearing of lazy strength there was none of the intense vitality betrayed by the stripling's keen glance and quiet heedfulness.

"Yume bleeze step alongzide, and yu'll zee the varm-yard where I du be goin' tu now. There be's rufe among the drees."

They had walked only a few paces along the lane to Southerleigh, preceding the slow-moving horse, when the newly slated roof of a small whitewashed farmhouse appeared.

"The varmer as rints the land arf Squire Trethewy du

live there, and I du wark vor 'un. Him be a turble skin-flint, but a straightvorward chap."

"Well, you've shown me the house where the Vicomte don't live, anyway," said the American, calmly. "I guess we're getting along first-class."

The carter was tickled by the imperturbability of the tone.

"Yu du be a turble vunny chap, young zur," he said admiringly. "I zeed that zo zune as I zeed 'ee. Yu'me bain't niver in no yurry var yu knows yu be witty enugh tu get yure own way tu the yend."

"If God Almighty would give me wit enough to find out all I want to know, I believe I should be better satisfied than I am," said the youth.

"Lard, that you wude, I'll be bound. Now, do 'ee luke on them chimleys. That be Southerleigh Cart, where Trethewys du live; 'tis the back on it like. The main road tu't du be on t'other side, through a big mead, what they du carl the park. But, lard bless 'ee, t'ain't what *I* carls a park. If you want a park, do 'ee go over Monksbere ways, up tu Coppses. *There* be a park, wi' deer and arl zarts."

"It's not so much a park I'm wanting just now, as to find out the way to M. de Nauroy's house."

"Bain't I a-tellin' on yu? Yu'me be poking vun at I vor going slow-like. 'Ere be the yard where I goes in. Yu'me bleeze tu go straight on down this 'ere lane. Yu'll zee a high warl, wi' a green dar set tu middle under thatch. That there be Honeycott, where old Pat, as we du carl 'un, du live. I doan't yappen tu's vurrin name. I wishee gude day, zur."

"Thank you, sir," said the young American, gravely returning the carter's salute.

The red mud of the lane was so deeply trampled before the farmyard gate by the hoofs of many cattle, that it

seemed well-nigh impassable. But the American swung himself lightly into the hedgerow on the high bank, avoided thus the swamp below, and chose his footing. He found the green door, lifted the latch, and, with brow unruffled and shoes unsoiled, stepped from the lane into the Vicomte's walled garden.

His quick glance comprehended instantly almost every detail of the group upon the lawn before the low, thatched cream-coloured cot.

In a wicker chair, which creaked and groaned beneath his massive person, sat M. le Vicomte, with a cigarette between his stained finger-tips, and not a few ashes therefrom reposing in the folds of his yellow waistcoat.

The kindness of his twinkling blue eyes belied the ferocity of his warlike moustache.

Upon his ample knee was perched—like a cherub suddenly alighted from the cloudless sky above—a blue-eyed, fair-haired child-angel, in the person of the five-year-old Kitty.

The two elder children were joyously leaning over a bowl of soapsuds on the grass, blowing bubbles, and shouting with excitement, as each frail rainbow-tinted globe rose above their heads and vanished into space; or sailed serenely over the high walls.

They paused in their amusement at the sight of a stranger, and the boy Odo sprang to his feet, whilst Rosaleen came sedately to her little sister's side.

Kitty slid from her grandfather's knee, and the two looked on with the deepest admiration whilst the Vicomte returned the young man's respectful bow with a magnificent French salutation of the old school.

"My name is Iron P. Brett, sir. I have been travelling in Europe with my father for the past year or so, and I've brought you a message from him on a matter of business."

Whether or no Mr. Brett was prepared for the embrace which old Patrick immediately bestowed upon him, he evinced no sign of discomfiture as he emerged from it, calm and serious, with a slightly heightened colour.

His impassive countenance relaxed, however, into a smile of unexpected pleasantness, when the old gentleman held up little Kitty and, in a voice of emotion, bade her welcome the son of his dearest friend and comrade who had come all the way from America to see them.

Iron P. Brett saluted the rosy cheek innocently offered him with a gentleness which pleased the Vicomte. Rosaleen was more timid than her younger sister, and her grandfather laughed with delight when the American dropped on one knee in the grass and kissed the little hand she held out. The action was so simple and natural that it never occurred even to Odo that it was laughable, and the little maiden herself, with soft dignity, and as a matter of course, accepted the young man's homage.

Such a delightful tea-party had never been known before; even *chez bon papa*.

The American devoted himself to the entertainment of his fellow-guests in a manner which the children regarded as marvellous. He allowed Rosaleen to tie knots in his handkerchief, and when he blew upon them, lo, they fell apart. He showered comfits from the curls of the petrified Odo, who made haste to eat them and assure himself of their reality. He swallowed half a crown before their very eyes, and then told Pélagie, who turned pale at the display of magic, that she would find it in her work-basket, which, sure enough, she did, and he presented it to her on the spot.

Bon papa laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks as he went to and fro with his noiseless steps in his heel-less slippers, to make fresh coffee for his guests; and

Pélagie was contented to remember that many extra cakes had already been baked in honour of Master Odo, whose appetite could always be depended upon.

In the interval of the entertainment she held mysterious consultations with her old master regarding the accommodation of the stranger, and the preparation of a suitable evening meal for his delectation.

Mr. Brett had his "five o'clocq" on the grass with Odo, who could hardly take his eyes off him; the little girls regretted their superior state at the wicker-table, apart from the fascinating visitor.

They became perfectly intimate with him in the course of an hour or so, and chattered before him freely with that lack of discretion which was natural to their age. After tea, Kitty made no objection when she was requested to recite *Maître Corbeau sur un arbre perché*, or such portions of it as she could remember with many anxious promptings from Rosaleen and nods and winks of encouragement from Pélagie, who stood with arms akimbo in the doorway of the kitchen, breathless with admiration and excitement.

Rosaleen then obliged the company with a song, and a sweet little treble pipe proclaimed—

> "*Il était une bergère,*
> *Et ron ron ron, petit patapon,*"

and when she came to the end,

> "*Ma fille pour pénitence*
> *Nous nous embrasserons,*"

the little sisters rushed into each other's arms for the illustrative hug, lost their balance, and rolled together among the buttercups, whilst *bon papa* beamed with pride as he scolded them for their awkwardness. For M. le Vicomte had the warm Irish heart that never grows old; the spontaneous gaiety of the Frenchman who is

not too dignified to be amused by little things, and the fondness of the grandparent who knows no greater delight than to promote the happiness of his children's children. It was not surprising that to the serious young American, who watched him, he appeared almost as childish as his little playmates, in spite of his grand courtesy and imposing presence.

When Odo's nurse presently appeared, to the disgust of her charge, and summoned him to come home, the young gentleman could hardly tear himself away from Mr. Iron P. Brett.

"Come over to Monksbere, *do*," he implored, "and see my pony and do tricks. Can you ride on one leg like the man in the circus? Show me how to do just one trick to play off on the other boys when I go to school. Can't I come over again, Mussoo, if the man from America is going to stay with you?"

Odo bore even Rosaleen's and Kitty's good-bye kisses with equanimity when his new friend shook hands with him gravely, and said he was pleased to have made his acquaintance. The Vicomte looked after the boy, and smiled to see him marching away with his nose in the air, indignantly refusing to take the proffered hand of his attendant.

The little girls, more ceremonious, prefaced their good-night kisses with elegant *révérences*, conscientiously performed by Rosaleen, who was much troubled by Kitty's perfunctory attempts at a curtsey.

The American permitted himself the momentary relaxation of a smile at the picture of that cherub dipping squarely into the buttercups, with pinafored skirts held out, prompted by the little, careful, elder sister.

Stout Pélagie picked up her charge and hugged her at the end of the small ceremony, and Rosaleen ran to open

the garden door, and ran back yet again to kiss her *bon papa;* and so the little procession passed out of sight; and the babble of merry voices on the other side of the wall grew fainter and died away.

"It is long—long since I have seen a face from the past," said old Patrick, "and your face comes to me from thence. You are so like your father, that if I had met you in the streets of Paris, I should certainly have known you. Yet you are young to be the son of John Brett."

"It did not occur to my parent to marry, sir, until he was somewhat advanced in years," said Mr. Brett.

"It is the face of the man I loved best in the world, when we were young together, that I now see before me again," said the Vicomte, who was too simple to fear the expression of sentiment.

"Of the man whom you rescued from debt and imprisonment in Paris," said the young American, taking the old gentleman's hand. "My father has spoken of it to me not once, nor twice. Did you think he had forgotten?"

"Chut, nonsense!" said the Vicomte; but he was pleased, nevertheless, and shook the strong young hand which held his own very kindly.

"In my youth, we who were comrades shared everything with each other as a matter of course; our amusements, our dinners, our money, which, I am bound to say, we treated in those days like dirt. I too, who speak to you, have passed through poverty—it has perhaps been the least of my misfortunes; but, nevertheless, prosperity returned, and I survived to be rich, as you see, and to become a proprietor."

He waved his hand suggestively round the garden.

There was nothing in or about the Vicomte's home to

suggest the wealth to which he referred, but he counted his riches by his necessities, which were not great.

The American glanced around him, and was silent.

"You have a message for me, *hein?*" his host said, looking down at the plain-featured, steadfast face. His blue eyes twinkled as he curled and twisted his ferocious moustache. "If it is nothing immediate, we will postpone it till after dinner. Me, I am never in a hurry for business; and there is, besides, the *ménage*."

"My father's message can very well wait till later, sir," said Iron Brett.

They dined together, very late—for the Vicomte's preparations took time—on *croûte-au-pot* and a *blanquette de veau*. Also they ate Pélagie's *pâtisserie*, and stewed green gooseberries heaped with scalded cream. The Vicomte brought out his favourite *vin de Madère sec*, but he was obliged to finish the bottle alone, for his guest was a water-drinker, and could not even be induced to end his dinner with a *petit verre* of old Cognac.

The fact was, Mr. Iron P. Brett was at once too young and too frugal to be an epicure, and noted with astonishment his host's prolonged and exquisite enjoyment of the repast before them.

But if the spareness of his appetite disappointed the old gentleman, his deft aid in clearing away the remains of the feast delighted his entertainer.

"It is easy to see you are not an Englishman, ma foi," said the Vicomte, candidly, "who would be astounded at the notion of handling a saucepan or a broom. His exercise must always be apart from useful work; and I am an eccentric, who sees foolishness in expending energy without purpose. The good for your constitution, bah! that comes by the way."

"I've had chores to do as a boy," said Mr. Brett, calmly washing and ranging plates. His coat was off and his sleeves were neatly rolled up. "My father and I have been up and down according to luck. When I was a young one we were most always down, so far as I can remember. Then things looked brighter, and my father sent me to Europe to be educated."

"Là—là—là," said the Vicomte, "and you liked that?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Brett, "I misliked it so much that I went right back to the old man. He was pretty mad with me for doing so; but I explained to him that I was born American, and I meant to stay American. I didn't relish being exiled that way from my native country."

"So then?"

"Then he had a spell of bad luck, and I guess my education took care of itself. I learnt all I wanted, though. And I helped my parent *some*." He showed a gleam of white even teeth in a good-humoured smile, the more attractive for its rarity. "And two years ago, when things began to brighten up a bit, he reckoned we might as well come and look round the old world as not. I wanted to study music and foreign languages, and my father wanted to prospect around. I've had a pretty good time, my father saw to that."

The Vicomte nodded absently, and glanced with pride at the spotless red-tiled kitchen, the scene of his recent labours.

"It is sufficient," he said gravely, assisting his guest to put on his coat. "The boy, when he comes in the morning, will find all in order. There is a lad, very stupid, but honest and faithful, who lights the fire for me, and tends my horse. But, yes, I have a horse, and a good one, though old; and a little *carriole* whose springs, alas, are too weak now for my weight. But Johnny drives my

Plon-Plon to market, where I sell much fruit, and make a good profit. As you see, I want for nothing."

He produced a tray, which he had thoughtfully filled with necessaries, and led the way into the little moonlit parlour he called his study. Here he suggested a cigarette apiece by the open window before retiring to bed.

The restfulness of his armchair, the freshness of the spring-scented night air, and the soothing influence of tobacco, inclined the Vicomte—who had talked almost incessantly for four hours—to slumber. But the young American took advantage of the lull to introduce his own business.

"Vicomte, I should like you to listen to my father's message now, right away," he said in his quiet distinct tones.

"I listen," said the Vicomte, waking himself with an effort.

"My father has invested money for you—in a small way, I believe——"

"Five and twenty years ago, before you were born; and it has paid good interest ever since," interrupted the Vicomte, in rather uneasy tones. "A safe investment, if ever a mine was a safe investment."

"A mine is not inexhaustible, sir."

"He made that clear to me some time since," said the Vicomte, cheerfully.

"There comes a time, in the history of some mining operations," said Iron Brett, "when the owners feel it prudent to wind up the private works, make it a public concern, and let the widows and orphans in."

"Your father would never——"

"No, sir. His son wouldn't let him, even if he wanted to. It's my business to see the old man don't run off the tracks in the excitement of the chase."

Old Patrick smiled in the dark. The extreme youthfulness of the speaker rang out so clearly in this slightly bombastic speech; but his sincerity also rang true, and his auditor permitted only a gentle satire to flavour his reply.

"I have heard that, in America, young men know more than their parents."

"Every generation ought to know more than the last, sir, and always has done so," said Mr. Brett, unabashed. "You inherit what your fathers found out, and you think some more for yourself on top. Our young men don't pretend to agree with their parents' notions all the time; or they'd make no progress, and there'd be trouble, the worst kind."

"In my young days, sir, I who speak to you," said the Vicomte, with emotion, "honoured my parents, and did not venture to dispute their opinions."

"Is that so, sir?" said the American, respectfully.

There was a short silence. Perhaps some recollection of his own impetuous youth caused old Patrick's conscience to prick him, for he changed the conversation.

"So the ore is worked out, *hein?*"

"The ore is worked out, sir," said Mr. Brett. "It paid the shareholders in the venture from ten to twenty per cent. while it lasted. No doubt they have repaid themselves their original capital long since."

"You resemble your father, who once wrote me a lecture on sinking funds, though he is as little given to writing letters as I am," said the Vicomte, shrugging his shoulders. "But my profits are safe. More than safe, for that money is not invested at all."

"Do you mean it is lying idle at your bankers?"

"What is left of it, yes," said the Vicomte, serenely. He did not add that a goodly proportion of it had found its way into the bottomless pockets of his son-in-law.

"That magnificent—that astounding interest of my little nest-egg, that I entrusted to your father, has been allowed to accumulate. It has been convenient sometimes to myself —or to others—to have it there. But your father's interest in the iron-works was much larger than mine."

"It was so," said Mr. Brett, with emphasis, "and whatever he may have written to you, I know he believed in his heart that the supply of ore was inexhaustible. Anyway, it was the first of all his ventures to turn up trumps, and he loved it like a child. He'd worked hard and he'd been unlucky all his life, and that was his first consolation. He named his only son after it, and he wears a watch-chain and a horseshoe pin made from its ore. But so far as the profits of his share in the iron-works are concerned," said the American, slowly, "he's locked them all up in other concerns that aren't ripe yet, and don't pay him a red cent, and that's a fact."

"Do you mean, young man, that John Brett is in want of money, and that he hasn't written to ask *me* for it?" said the Vicomte, in rather a trembling tone.

Iron Brett looked away from his host, and seemed to hesitate.

"It looks like—he's asking for it now, sir," he said in a low tone. "At least, that's the message I'm charged with."

There was a moment's pause, and the young man spoke more lightly.

"The fact is, sir, my father was born a speculator, and I believe he's got to speculate. I believe that old man could easier live without food and drink than without prospecting around. He can't leave his post, and that's why he's sent me instead of coming himself. He bade me ask you to let him have every dollar you could lay hands on, that the chance of a lifetime mayn't slip away from him, for want of a little more capital to work it with."

The Vicomte nooded his head thoughtfully, and Mr. Brett from his dark corner watched the glint of moonlight upon the reflective face and silvered hair.

"I was just thinking, my son," said old Patrick, simply, "that it is fortunate after all that I didn't invest that money."

"Are you going to let my father have what he asks for, right now, sir?"

"But, certainly. All that is at my disposal. I have no great need of money. That is for myself, others——" He hesitated, and repeated firmly, "Others have had more than enough already. For me, my pension is sufficient. My daughter's *dot* provides for my little ones. The rest is at your father's service."

"He was certain you wouldn't fail him," said the young man, and there was an inflection of triumph and of pleasure in his tone.

"We have never failed each other," said old Patrick.

He rose and lit a candle, and went with his shuffling step to an old bureau in the corner of the scantily furnished sitting-room.

With glasses on nose, and fumbling hands, he found and produced a cheque-book, where a scribbled memorandum on the back of the last counterfoil notified the amount of his balance, and represented all the accounts he ever kept.

"The remains of the accumulated interest of my share of the ironworks for the past fifteen years comes to something over five thousand pounds," said the Vicomte, looking over his glasses at his visitor with some pride. "It is a large sum, a fortune in itself. But if that is not sufficient, I could realize my English investments in the course of a few days; about three thousand more."

Mr. Brett did not betray his opinion of the importance

of the sum mentioned by so much as the movement of a muscle of his face; but he realized that the old gentleman was offering his all without reserve.

"My father told me that the friendship between you was something out of the common, and I'm beginning to credit it," he said gently.

"The friendships of our youth—so close, so warm, so uncalculating—they are out of the common as we grow older. They should not seem so to you," said the Vicomte, sadly. "We spent golden days together."

"You helped him in his need, sir."

"It was my happiness to do so, I admit it. As he would have helped me."

"He swore to make your fortune, didn't he, sir, in return?"

"As soon as he should make his own," said the Vicomte, and smiled. "That time has not yet arrived, *hein?* But, what of that? His was a noble spirit, capable of infinite gratitude. We loved one another tenderly; we were faithful comrades, as well as kindred souls. Then love—and life—and work—and distance separated us. Yet when I speak his name—John Brett—a thousand recollections of my youth thrill me, old as I am." He laughed, but the tears stood in his eyes. "It is well that we should not meet. Each thus remains young to the other."

"It is curious that my father should have made that very remark to me, when he sent me here in his stead to see you," said Iron Brett.

"Voilà," said the Vicomte, "did I not say we were kindred souls? So. Our business is finished, my son, for if you are his son, you are also certainly mine. We understand each other. There is no more to say."

"There's something more to say on our side, sir."

"Eh bien?"

"I believe that my parent's venture this time is a pretty considerable safe one," said Iron Brett, thoughtfully. "But you won't need a young man of my age to tell you, Vicomte, that there's no such thing as certainty in mining speculation. The unforeseen is bound to occur sooner or later, and then there's trouble. Now, you've not asked me one single question, nor mentioned the word *interest* on this sum, nor suggested any security."

"I am not a professional money-lender, sir," said the Vicomte, growing red in the face. "Your father has invested money for me before now. Of his business I understand nothing—and speculation has never interested me. Last time he succeeded; if this time he fails, there is no more to be said."

"He's not a man to fail permanently, if I know him, once fortune gives him a chance," said his son, proudly. "He'd have landed long ago, sir, if he hadn't looked quite so far ahead. He's got a contempt for present profits that I never saw equalled, and that's hardly justifiable in a man that isn't sure he's going to live to be a hundred years old. As it is, I have reason to believe that my grandsons may be very rich men. That will be poor consolation for you, Vicomte, if the money you've loaned to my father gets lost."

"If it gets lost, it is no longer a loan, but a gift."

"*No*, sir," said Iron Brett, "a free-born American doesn't accept gifts."

"If I were in monetary difficulties, young gentleman," said the Vicomte, with extraordinary dignity, "do you suppose I should refuse to allow my old friend to assist me?"

"I am quite sure you would, sir," said the American.

The Vicomte pushed his chair back and looked rather helplessly across the candle-lit room at his guest.

Iron Brett rose from his dark corner and tossed his cigarette-end out of the window.

It struck old Patrick that the impassive plain-featured face had suddenly become expressive; that a subtle humour lurked in Mr. Brett's smile; that the bright eyes looked at him almost tenderly.

The American was very young, after all, though he was so wise and self-possessed. Even his attitude was a boyish one, as he stood with his hands in the pockets of his coat, his slight active figure clearly outlined against the summer darkness of the open casement.

The tones of his voice rang out with the lofty unhesitating confidence of his one and twenty years.

"So you see, sir, I couldn't allow my father, even if he wished it, which he does not, to accept anything from you, or another man, without giving you what he has to give—in return. Therefore I shall hand you my formal acceptance of this loan on his behalf, on condition you allow him to allocate you a third share in this new venture, which we calculate to keep in the family as closely as possible. This will entitle you to a third of the profits if it succeeds; and if it fails, you've no call to feel uneasy, for I myself shall stand security for the repayment of the original loan within a given number of years. Say two."

"Ten," said the Vicomte, taken unawares.

"Two," said the young American, and smiled, holding out his hand to his father's friend.

Later, finding himself alone in his low-ceiled bedroom under the thatch, Iron Brett took a letter from his breast-pocket, and, by the light of his solitary candle, glanced over the concluding paragraph.

"... *now that I am a rich man, the first thing I want to have you do is to find out the Vicomte de Nauroy. His*

address is Devonshire, England. I disremember the details, but I should opine there isn't any other man of that name living around in that district. You've got to fix it so I get square with him and make his fortune, but not in such a hurry that he'll suspect me of taking any liberty of the sort, for you've got to deal with the proudest man in Paris. If you tell him what these shares would be worth in the market, he won't feel like subscribing any. How'd it be if you let him think I want to borrow his money? I believe that would fetch him right away; and I wouldn't be surprised to learn that the news that John Brett has made five million dollars in one deal hasn't reached Europe yet."

Iron Brett folded up the letter and put it carefully away in his pocket-book.

"I guess I've carried out my parent's instructions this time," he reflected; "and I didn't altogether enjoy fooling the old gentleman even for his own good either. But if John Brett has a fancy for playing Providence once in a while, I don't see why his son shouldn't help him, anyway."

CHAPTER III

THE two years that elapsed before Iron Brett paid his second visit to Honeycott seemed a short interval to him, but to Rosaleen and Kitty almost a lifetime.

He met them at the cross-roads, walking hand in hand, and they had grown so unlike the rosy, chubby babies of his recollection, that he might not have recognized them but for the exclamation of the elder.

"Kitty, Kitty! It's the man from America."

"So it is," said Iron Brett, stopping short and saluting them gravely. "It's pretty 'cute of you to remember me, if I've changed as much as you have, anyway."

He shook hands seriously with both little sisters, and glanced quickly from one to the other.

It seemed to him that the lapse of time was hardly sufficient to account for the change in both.

An indescribable but obvious air of neglect and sadness was produced by their whole dress and aspect.

Kitty had shot up from a plump cherub into a thin little seven-year-old maid. Her golden curls were cropped, her blue eyes looked forth from a tiny, pale, transparent face, disfigured by the loss of her first teeth. She was almost as tall as Rosaleen, who was of sturdier build.

But the little elder sister, too, had lost the red flush of health, with the quaint air of importance which had characterized her.

Her small brown face was thin; her straight black brows met in an anxious frown above great, brilliant hazel eyes, precociously intelligent and melancholy; her glance had grown timid.

On closer inspection the man from America observed that Kitty had been crying; the tears glistened yet upon her curling eyelashes.

"Why, what's the trouble?" he asked in a very gentle tone. "Grandpa's all right, isn't he?"

Kitty's lip began to quiver.

"She can't bear any one to speak kindly to her when she's crying," said Rosaleen, with the anxious air of a little old woman, "or she can't stop at all."

"Well, I guess I've got a sort of medicine here that dries little girls' tears," said Mr. Brett, cheerfully; and he brought a white parcel out of his pocket and sat down by the roadside, presently disclosing a box of Paris *bonbons*.

"You eat up some of this candy, and tell me if you can cry after that."

"Then are you *really* magic?" asked Kitty, solemnly.

"We used to think you were magic because of the tricks you did. But Charlotte said you were only a conjuror," explained Rosaleen.

"Oh, that's what Charlotte said. And who's Charlotte?"

"Our new sister," said Kitty.

"We've got a new mamma too since you came," said Rosaleen.

"Is that so? She don't seem to have agreed with you very well," said the American, dryly.

"Pélagie doesn't live with us no longer either," said Rosaleen. "She's gone back to live with grandpapa."

"What's that for?"

"She pets Kitty when she's naughty," said Rosaleen, in awestruck tones.

"You don't tell! And who pets you when you're naughty?"

"I'm never naughty," said Rosaleen, without elation, but as one stating a regrettable fact. "It's because I'm a prig. It's worse to be a prig than to be naughty like Kitty."

"Seems to me Charlotte ought to be perfect if you two are so bad," said Mr. Brett, thoughtfully.

Rosaleen shook her head.

"Charlotte is by far the naughtiest of us all," she said.

"I declare I think better of Charlotte than your first allusion led me to suppose possible," said Mr. Brett, encouragingly.

Rosaleen looked puzzled.

"I'm not telling tales," she said anxiously. "Because Charlotte doesn't care; she said so."

"And what's become of the little boy?"

"Odo?"

"I believe that was it. Has he got a new mother too?"

"Not exactly. But she's got a new name."

"Great Scott! a new father, then?"

"No, the same old father. But now he's Sir Thomas; he used to be plain Mr. Copp. And so Odo's mother is a ladyship."

"It seems to me you've all been going ahead pretty fast since I came here. How's grandpa?"

"He's—just the same," said Rosaleen, considering.

"We doesn't go to tea with *bon papa* no more now," said Kitty, who was imbibing doses of the magic medicine with the best results, so far as her inclination to shed tears was concerned.

"What's that for?"

Rosaleen hesitated.

"I'm not sure," she said doubtfully, "but I think it's

because the new mamma is very rich, and grandpapa is very poor."

"Christopher Columbus!" shouted the American, springing from his seat so suddenly that the children were startled. "That's nothing," he said apologetically, and sat down again. "I was just wondering why on earth some folks take it into their heads to play Providence, and it made me feel badly for a moment."

"I hope you will soon be better," said Rosaleen, politely.

She watched him with alarmed eyes. Kitty crunched *bonbons* undisturbed. It was nothing to her that the man from America should jump up and down. All his ways were magical, and therefore none of them were surprising in the eyes of Kitty.

Mr. Brett pulled a long piece of grass, and chewed it thoughtfully.

"So your grandpa's poor," he said presently.

"Very poor indeed," said Rosaleen, wistfully.

Kitty, without looking up, proffered an explanation.

"Daddy says the man from America took away all *bon papa's* money," she said calmly. "Did you?"

Mr. Brett's grey eyes seemed to take fire. Then he smiled rather queerly.

Rosaleen flushed from brow to chin.

"Kitty, you know you shouldn't have said that," she said distressfully, "for we asked *bon papa*, and he said it was a mistake of daddy's, and he was very angry, and he loved the man from America very much."

The facile tears flooded Kitty's blue eyes.

"Never mind," said Mr. Brett, gently. "If the man from America took your grandpa's money away, I guess he'll bring it back."

But Rosaleen was indignant with her sister.

"I think Kitty'll be sick if she eats so much chocolate," she said, with severity, "and she deserves to be."

Mr. Brett closed the box in haste.

Kitty smiled on him serenely.

"I likes the medicine," she said.

He held out the *bonbonnière* to Rosaleen, feeling her fitness to accept the responsibility.

Then he rose and surveyed the fallen tree on which they had been sitting.

"That's the same identical log I sat on two years since, I do believe. It's not gone ahead like the rest of you."

"It's been there for years and years," said Rosaleen. "How I know, we've always played there."

"Don't you feel lonesome out here on the high-road, you two forlorn little things?" he asked.

"We may go where we like now, so as to learn not to be molly-coddles. Charlotte comes generally. But she couldn't do her sum."

"She cried and cried," said Kitty.

"She always cries all lesson-time," said Rosaleen.

"That sounds real cheerful for her teacher," said Mr. Brett.

"The new mamma teaches us," said Rosaleen.

As they turned the corner into the lane, a little figure came hurrying towards them.

"That's Charlotte," said Rosaleen and Kitty, simultaneously.

Mr. Brett scanned the advancing child, and the corners of his mouth twitched. Yet Charlotte's face bore traces of tears just as plainly as Kitty's. Her pale blue eyes were red and swollen. But her face was so round, her eyebrows so arched, and her nose so *retroussé*, that a comical expression shone through her woe, and overpowered the sympathy of the beholder.

Her speed relaxed, and her lower lip dropped with astonishment when she perceived the stranger.

Rosaleen hastened forward.

"It's the man from America," she said breathlessly.

"He's brought some new medicine, and he *is* magic," said Kitty.

Charlotte brightened up.

"Do you mean the conjuror? Is he going to Honeycott? Oh——" The face grew woeful again. "P'raps we shan't be allowed to go to grandpa. Won't you come and do tricks at Southerleigh?"

"Maybe I'll be able to, and maybe not," said Mr. Brett, gravely.

"But how shall we *know?* The door's bricked up between the gardens, cos ma found out that Johnny took the parsley. Oh, we could meet you in the lane," said Miss Charlotte. "Ma would never know."

"Kitty's sure to tell," said Rosaleen.

"I'm sure to tell," echoed Kitty, regretfully conscious of her own incurable indiscretion.

"And there's the sweets——" said Rosaleen.

"Sweets! What sweets? Why didn't you say so before?" cried Charlotte.

As the three heads bent over the chocolate-box, Iron Brett lifted the latch of the Vicomte's garden door, and stepped within. The children were so engrossed that they did not notice his disappearance.

A thin steady line of blue smoke rose from the white chimney above the brown thatch of the roof.

The pear-tree bloom was over, but a red horse-chestnut held a thousand stiff waxen nosegays above the yellow showers of the laburnum. The white lilacs were drooping in the hot sunshine of noon.

On the apricot-tinted walls of the little homestead, above the neatly pruned fruit trees, the early Banksia roses clustered thickly. A gay red-and-white honeysuckle trailed heavy masses of scented blossom round the porch, meeting a snowy wisteria. An unseen choir of birds rioted in the flowering orchards on the hillside, and near at hand a blackbird whistled merrily in the cherry tree.

Iron Brett had emerged from a London fog that morning, and he appreciated the more the purity of the air; the freshness and fragrance of the green Devon valley, with its white wealth of May blossom.

He walked up the narrow path between the homely borders of forget-me-nots and wallflowers, and knocked with his stick at the wooden side of the porch.

Old Patrick appeared at the door of the red-tiled kitchen, with a shoe in one hand and a polisher in the other. He uttered a joyful exclamation and advanced to embrace his friend without pausing to disembarrass himself of either article.

"Time is up, Vicomte," said Mr. Brett, composedly, "and I've come to report progress in business."

"Ah, my friend!" said the Vicomte. He sank into a creaking wicker armchair, dropped the shoe beside him, and wiped his eyes with the polishing cloth. "Matters of business, alas, interest me no longer as they did. For me you come too late. I am overwhelmed with trouble more serious."

Mr. Brett reflected humorously that the Vicomte's interest in business matters must be small indeed to have lessened perceptibly; but he composed himself, noting that the old gentleman characteristically demanded no particulars of his errand, and seated himself in the porch opposite his father's friend.

"Why, what's the trouble, Vicomte?" he asked gently.

The Vicomte was obliged to overcome a burst of emotion before he could reply at all. When he had recovered himself—and after he had offered Mr. Brett every refreshment that his house contained, and a good many that it did not—old Patrick became serious, and even tragic, as he related the events of the past two years ; which seemed to him so much more important than anything his friend's son might have to impart concerning his own fortunes.

"Figure to yourself, *mon ami*, that that miserable young man, my son-in-law, the father of my little ones, has married a new wife—a widow with a child. A bride, *ma foi,—d'un âge inconnu, et laide à faire peur*."

"What did he do that for ?" said Mr. Brett, considering.

"Who knows ?" said the Vicomte, shrugging his shoulders despairingly. "But yes, after all, why should I pretend that I do not know ?"

The tears stole down his fat cheeks and fell on to his yellow waistcoat, but he made no effort to disguise them. The appealing glance he bestowed upon the young American was pathetic, yet also undeniably comical.

"My friend—Iron—*Dieu, quel drôle de nom !* Iron, I will confide in you. My feelings must perforce be hidden from others, but there comes a time when the overburdened heart rebels. I have to be hypocrite, do you see ? I have to show civility to this woman for the sake of my little ones, and also to the poor fool, my son-in-law, who thinks that because he no longer owes me money he no longer owes me anything."

"He owed you money, sir ?"

The poor Vicomte hurriedly excused himself for allowing this fact to escape him. But he longed so greatly for sympathy, as he had truly avowed, that he was presently

tempted to make one disclosure after another, until the situation became clear to his auditor.

"I had lent him a large sum, shortly before you came, and he promised it should be the last. He said it would clear all his liabilities. On this condition I lent more than he asked. Remember that when my daughter married him, I paid off the mortgages on his land, and purchased from him this cottage and garden. I thought myself rich, for I had inherited a small fortune; but what fortune could withstand such profligacy? Scarcely had you departed—but think not that I am reproaching you—he came to me for more money. More money! You know well that I had no more. How could I suppose he would require it? On the contrary, I imagined that I had at last satisfied his demands. Then he confessed to me that since the death of my Rosalie he had mortgaged once more the lands of Southerleigh—and the house."

"What does he do with his money?"

"Who knows. He must eat it. He went racing, but not continually. I know little of his doings. This I knew, that since my daughter's death he was much away from home. But he left always my little ones in my care, and I was glad. The winters he spent in the South. This the doctors have always recommended." He tapped his chest significantly. "Perhaps he gambled, it is probable. That he was idle and dissipated I have perceived very well. A man of this kind can never account for his money. It goes —thus"—he snapped his fingers. "But he is now in safe keeping; this also I perceive. He will dissipate no more money. He is even to pass the winter in England. So Madame has decreed. She loves not to make the journey, nor to pay for it. Certainly his health will suffer."

"And he asked you to pay off his mortgages a second time?"

CHAPTER IV

THE new Mrs. George Trethewy prided herself upon the excellence of her housekeeping.

She was determined that her servants should get the worst of everything at the least possible expense to herself. She was for ever counting halfpence, suspecting short weight, and pouncing upon abuses in the back premises; and she appeared content to sacrifice her own leisure and peace of mind to her resolve that her domestics should enjoy neither.

In the seventies the belief that excessive hardship and scanty fare were wholesome for the young had not altogether died out; and Mrs. Trethewy, who was a determined opponent of modern innovations, held by this precept with all her might.

She scanned her grocer's list for the cheapest provisions obtainable, and grudgingly measured out the same for use in the kitchen and nursery.

She condemned wholesale the hand-knitted garments wherewith the simple Pélagie had thought to defend her nurslings from the winter cold; and decreed that children must be hardened, and that coddling them in wool was likely to prove detrimental to their health.

Charlotte wore calico all the year round; and, though she suffered from frequent snuffling colds and perpetual earache, was a stout, well-grown girl; and to Charlotte her mother pointed as a proof of the excellence of her system.

Hitherto the tenderest chickens, the freshest eggs and cream, the soundest and ripest fruit, had been by common consent the portion of Rosaleen and Kitty, the treasures and darlings of the household.

Pélagie had scarcely needed to uphold their interests, which were jealously guarded by Mrs. Broome, the cook, who had been their father's nurse.

Now, a large proportion of the produce of the gardens and home-farm found its way to market, and Mrs. Trethewy believed herself to be only maintaining the proper supremacy of parents when she set aside the best of the remainder for herself and her husband, and doled out salt butter, skimmed milk, and damaged fruit to the children.

The greediness of Charlotte became in time comprehensible to her astonished little companions.

The squire was too idle or too indifferent to interfere. Perhaps he believed his new wife was more likely to be right than wrong in her innovations. His want of principle and perception had early led him to the weak conclusion that most things which were right were also unpleasant.

Little Rosaleen did not lack perception, but she was not old enough to doubt the judgment of the new mamma. She accepted with melancholy conviction the revelation of her own wickedness—the wickedness of Pélagie—of Broome the butler, and of Mrs. Broome the cook, hitherto revered authorities. Most extraordinary of all, her eyes were opened to the depravity of the five-year-old Kitty.

Shortly after the arrival of the new mamma, Rosaleen had been ordered to attend her after breakfast, in the dining-room, for a preliminary examination before joining the regular lessons which were daily administered to the weeping Charlotte in that apartment.

She had stood abashed at first to hear her appalling ignorance severely commented upon; but her intelligence

being almost as remarkable as Charlotte's stupidity, she escaped her stepmother's wrath, though not her suspicion.

"You must have learnt this column of spelling before, though you said you had never seen it. No child of seven could have mastered it in the time," said Mrs. Trethewy, surveying with contempt the little, soft shrinking being before her chair. "If you'll own it *at once*, I'll forgive you this time."

Rosaleen said "Yes, mamma," with the utmost meekness, and with no idea that she was in any way departing from the truth; her only object being to soothe and please her instructress, whose perpetual indignation she was at a loss to understand.

Kitty was to have joined the class presided over by Mrs. Trethewy, but the first attempt to teach her proved so disastrous that her education was postponed until the removal of Pélagie had been successfully accomplished.

On finding herself set up in a high chair opposite her new mamma, and ordered to remove her thumb from her mouth, and to concentrate her attention upon the tattered spelling-book which had been Charlotte's first guide into the paths of learning, Kitty tarried not for explanation, but burst into such a roar of terror and dismay that neither the entreaties of Rosaleen nor the threats of Mrs. Trethewy were audible.

Pélagie rushed from the nursery, to rescue her spoilt child from the ungentle hands which were shaking her almost into convulsions, in the effort to hush her screams.

George Trethewy, pipe in mouth, with frowning, flaxen brows, appeared upon the scene, and surveyed it; leaning sulkily against the door-post, impatient of the new disturbances in his household.

"You'd better leave her alone, Maria, she's past hearing sense now," he said. "Take her upstairs, Pélagie."

Rosaleen did not hear the words Mrs. Trethewy whispered to her husband, but Charlotte obligingly reported later that Kitty was to be let off this time, because it was all Pélagie's fault; but in the future such exhibitions of temper would be severely punished. Her days became overshadowed by a vague anxiety for her baby sister.

Some little maidens develop almost in infancy the instincts of motherhood; the love of protecting and managing those younger or weaker than themselves—the sense of responsibility—the patience, the order, and the industry which others may or may not acquire in later life. Rosaleen belonged to this not very uncommon order of feminine creation.

But under the new *régime* the funny, loving, old-fashioned little woman of seven gradually relapsed into a shrinking, helpless, self-conscious child.

Her mistakes derided, her confident efforts to emulate her elders snubbed, she became afraid to act on impulse. Her precocious intelligence, denied its natural outlet, spent itself in idle day-dreams.

Rosaleen was bewildered.

The child who tried hard to do right, she discovered, was a prig. No doubt her step-mother was correct in describing her by this name, since Pélagie had always declared her to be *très sérieuse*, which meant, as Rosaleen very well knew, that she was sensible and trustworthy beyond her years, and not that she was of a grave or serious disposition. The term rankled, and caused her indescribable shame and misery. She lay awake at night, inventing schemes of villainy, which, when indulged, would disqualify her for ever for such a description; but with morning light, the baby wisdom she could not help invariably prevailed, and priggishness triumphed once more.

The child who did *not* try to be good, however, was

described by Mrs. Trethewy, in no uncertain terms, as a fool. Merry little Kitty made no such effort, so that her folly was certain, and her qualification for punishment undoubted.

The child who did not mind punishment (but Kitty could not be included in this category) was a monster. Charlotte, it appeared, answered to this description.

Her step-sisters regarded her with equal admiration and disapproval.

Charlotte was good-natured, in spite of her monstrosity. She was also rather sly, and never hesitated to deceive her parent when occasion offered; but she was the humble follower of her junior, Rosaleen, and stole lumps of sugar for Kitty's delectation without remorse.

Pélagie, in her inevitable banishment to Honeycott, heard reports which troubled her placid soul a little; but her belief in the wit and sense of Rosaleen, and the high spirit of Kitty, caused her rather to chuckle than to sigh over the battles with their step-mother that would doubtless ensue.

Pélagie's intelligence was not of a very high order. She was at once too humble and too easy-going herself to realize the helplessness of the cleverest child in the hands of a hard and determined grown-up person.

Had she felt real uneasiness, she would not have hesitated to carry the servants' reports to her master; but she shrank from inflicting pin-pricks upon that great heart, which had known sorrow and disappointment enough already.

Old Patrick did not need explanation. The babble of his little ones, their altered looks, and his own observation, told him much of the state of things which had arisen at Southerleigh.

He had his dark moments, doubtless, of fury and resentment. But he had this good fortune, that he had been born with the "merry heart that goes all the day," and was

thus enabled to meet misfortune with the courage that defends real depth of feeling, as surely as feeble despondency and lamentation allow it to evaporate.

He possessed his soul in patience, and bided his time. The children had never seen *bon papa* more gay, nor found him more tenderly indulgent. They attributed this constant light-heartedness to his joy in Pélagie's return to Honeycott.

"To-night," said the Vicomte, "I am invited—nay commanded, to dine *chez M. mon beau fils*. Some one has failed them, but the dinner must be eaten. Madame economizes in the *ménage*, you understand. For the sake of my little ones I go. I sent word of your arrival, but they will not excuse me from paying this homage. They invite you also."

"I shall be very pleased to make their acquaintance, sir," said Mr. Brett, seriously.

"A strange guest is doubly welcome in a desolate *entourage*," said the Vicomte. "Here the neighbours are few. Me, I am old and uninteresting, but your presence will put madame certainly in a good humour. *Tiens! la bonne idée!* I will tell her of your riches, you shall tell her of mine." His spirits rose; he burst into a gay laugh. "The vulgar, my son, have a respect for riches which they do not always accord to virtue."

"That is so, Vicomte, but riches are harder to get. Anybody can be virtuous who has a mind to," said Mr. Brett, slowly. "If I were in your place, sir, I believe I should take my chance of being respected on that account. I believe I should be sustained by the consciousness of my own worth, and not be in a hurry to give any one the chance of making me worth any less, by getting into my debt."

"It was but a pleasantry," said the Vicomte, penitently.

"I am not one to boast. On the contrary, I have learnt my lesson. Of my affairs I speak no more. The ingratitude of that *misérable* has sealed my lips for ever. One day he will regret his incivility, and madame also will regret; but I shall not be there to behold their dismay, though it amuses me now to figure it to myself. Yes, they have been uncivil. I am now, it appears, not sufficiently presentable to be invited when there is a dinner-party. I, that have dined with kings. To-night we are to be *en famille*." He laughed rather drearily at the thought of such a family party.

It was yet daylight when the old man and the young one left the cottage together, and walked through the lane and the shrubbery, which concealed the back premises of the Court, to the front entrance.

The house was now just a century old; an unpretentious white building, with a slated roof.

The windows of the drawing-room looked upon a level lawn, shaded by some great elms and a spreading cedar, and ornamented by a fountain and a rustic summer-house.

The sloping meadows, dubbed park by courtesy, were divided from the lawn, the shrubbery, and the gravelled space before the portico by an iron paling.

Beyond stretched a wide view of fertile country and blue hills—the distant square tower of Domaford church rose above the rounded outline of the Monksbere woods.

The young American surveyed the scene in silence; after the roar and dust of the city—here was the still loveliness of the country-side, on a perfect May evening.

"I don't know, sir," he said at length, in hushed tones, "that I ever saw a prettier or more peaceful spot; or breathed a sweeter air."

The Vicomte was gratified.

"Ten years ago I used almost the same words," he said,

"when my child brought me to this flowery country, who was herself but a delicate flower. One of the inhabitants told me that the local tradition was that no one need die among the Cullaway hills except from old age."

He sighed at the recollection.

Old Broome was waiting at the door, and conducted the gentlemen into the drawing-room, in the dejected silence which was now habitual to him in receiving the guests of his new mistress.

Mrs. Trethewy received her visitors majestically; standing by the centre table, which held an unlighted lamp, and six gilt-edged volumes placed at equal distances round it. The crown of her head barely reached the shoulder of her tall, yellow-haired husband, and she was somewhat too obviously his senior by several years. Her thread-paper person was enclosed in what would then have been considered a very handsome silk dress, of a bright magenta hue, trimmed with fringe and tassels.

Beneath the cap which was at that time thought essential to the dignity of a married woman, her sandy-coloured hair was smoothly pomatumed on either side of a high, narrow forehead. A long-nosed, thin-lipped face—a laboured smile which did not suit the mouth,—and a pair of red-rimmed, angry, coffee-coloured eyes, which contradicted the smile.

Old Patrick's heart sank as he greeted her, and as it sank every time he looked at the woman who held the happiness of the little ones he loved between her hands.

He obtained small consolation when he turned to his son-in-law.

The best friends of George Trethewy could say no more for him than that he was a harmless kind of fellow. His good nature was of the negative order. He was moderately contented when nothing occurred to interfere with his

personal comfort, and weakly fretful when things went wrong.

His physical strength was as deficient as his moral force.

His large clear blue eyes and transparent skin betrayed a tendency to that fell disease which haunts some of the most sheltered corners of the mild and beautiful west country.

He was delighted with his own cleverness in securing a wife rich enough to clear his estate and free him of his obligations to his father-in-law; and yet there were moments when the squire half impatiently, half sulkily regretted his freedom.

He could not but be aware that his home had been a more pleasant and peaceful one before this severe little person had turned it upside down, bullied his old servants, and scared the merriment out of his children.

But once the deed was done, he lacked energy to interfere with the decrees of the small autocrat he had introduced. He handed over his responsibilities to her, with the debts and difficulties which had accrued, and which she was willing and eager to take upon herself, though they swallowed up all the accumulated savings of her widowhood, and much besides, and left her poorer than she had ever thought to be again.

She might be mean, but she was almost fiercely honest according to her lights, this hard and grasping little woman.

She felt more than justified in exercising the rigid economy her soul loved, in the hope of one day repaying herself the large sums with which she had been forced to part.

When her husband resented her excessive carefulness, she did not hesitate to reproach him for his callousness

regarding her own loss of fortune, and the ruin of Charlotte's inheritance. Thus the Vicomte spoke truly enough when he predicted that the yoke of his obligations to his wife would sit heavily on the neck of George Trethewy; but he possessed neither courage nor strength to throw it off, and at times felt a vague and dreary pleasure in the certainty of the increased prosperity of Southerleigh. Though she occasionally grumbled, Mrs. Trethewy was also proud of her tall, good-looking husband, and prouder still of the social position she had attained as the wife of a country squire—a position much in advance of anything she had hoped for in earlier life.

She put away from her as far as possible all recollections of the sturdy Plymouth shipbuilder, who had been the husband of her youth, and whose hard-earned thousands had brought her to this elevation.

She never mentioned him to his child, nor made any allusion to the humble position in which he had found and courted her, but left it to be supposed that she had always been used to a roomy country house, the attentions of respectable country servants, and the command of an old-fashioned carriage.

The past is constantly recalled when its splendours have faded, but it is curious to note how entirely its conditions sink into oblivion when the present offers superior fortune or dignity.

"There the old woman du zit, tozzing her yead, and smilin' tu make a peg zick," reported Broome to his wife, in the intervals of the dinner she was anxiously serving, "telling the yold gintleman that her doant make no difference betwigst her own little un and ar tu little maids. Lard be muzzivul tu's ar, thinks I, ef they's tu be tret tu ar that there skeered ill-vavoured little toad have tu putt

oop wi!" And he ended sorrowfully, "I doubt but her'll gammon the yold gintleman; her du have zuch vine coompany manners, zuch as yu wudent niver believe what a proper vixen her du be tu week-days. I can't yardley du my sarvice var staring at she. Her du 'maze me zo."

"Him's none zuch a vamous vule as yu du be, Broome, var tu be tuke in zo vast," said his wife, contemptuously.

The Vicomte was not taken in, though he listened politely to all Mrs. Trethewy had to say.

"After living in a garrison town," she remarked, with an archness that somehow entirely quenched the twinkle in the Vicomte's blue eyes, and brought never a smile to the grave eyes of his young companion, "you may suppose how dull the country seems to me. And so few neighbours and all. Of course Lady Copp is very friendly. But they're so much away, and she's always got people there, and so they can't come and dine. Naturally *we* go *there* a good deal. And the distances are so great. No popping in and out in a friendly way. And I tell the squire he is too bad, for he never will come round and pay visits with me."

"It is very remiss of him," said the Vicomte, gravely.

"If it wasn't for running over to Monksbere so often when the Copps are at home—if it wasn't for my intimacy with Lady Copp, I don't know what I should do."

The Vicomte was aware of the exact extent of Mrs. Trethewy's intimacy with Lady Copp, but he contented himself with supposing that her time must be fully occupied with her household affairs, the education of the children, and the improvements of house and garden which she had undertaken.

"Oh, I have plenty to do," said the lady, tossing her head. "The place has been neglected for years upon years, inside and out, not a penny spent on it. It is easy to see how a mistress was wanted, to keep an eye. I've made a

lot of changes already, but you'll see a lot more presently, I can assure you."

"Madame, I do not doubt it," said the Vicomte.

The squire, whose notions of comfort did not accord with his wife's ideas of gentility, proposed, as soon as the cloth was removed for dessert, that they should all adjourn to the garden and smoke; but she declined, with much archness, to accompany the gentlemen out-of-doors, and invited them not to linger over their cigars, but to join her speedily in the drawing-room.

A sensible calm stole over the little party when it was relieved of her presence.

George Trethewy led the way on to the lawn before the open windows of the drawing-room, and they sat and smoked in restful silence under the trees.

The new moon brightened above the hills, and the tinkling sound of poor Rosalie's cherished fountain faintly reached them across the dim flower-beds of her loved garden.

A footstep crunched the gravel, and a deep hesitating voice uttered Trethewy's name in cautious accents.

"It's all right, old man, we're alone," said the squire.

The darkness so soothed his bashfulness that he had almost forgotten the presence of a stranger, and he mumbled an awkward apology to Mr. Brett.

The Vicomte heard something like a sigh of relief as John Webber, the stalwart vicar of Luscombe, joined them, and smoked his pipe of peace likewise in their company.

Since the advent of the second Mrs. Trethewy, he had come seldom to Southerleigh. She objected almost equally to his intimacy with her husband, his sporting proclivities, and his strong native accent.

Rosalie's piano presently sounded from the drawing-room, and "Rousseau's Dream," thumped by unmusical

hands, effectually woke the listeners from the calm and drowsy after-dinner content induced by the warmth of the night, the soothing influence of tobacco, and the silence of the darkness.

Iron Brett uttered a kind of groan, rose from his seat abruptly, and went towards the open window.

They saw his dark figure silhouetted for a moment against the light of the interior, before he finally entered the house.

"Rousseau's Dream" ceased; there arose a murmur of voices, a shrill, affected laugh, and a pause.

The poor old jingling piano spoke again. But this time how differently.

The listeners were stirred to emotion, or to vague pleasure, according to the musical susceptibility of their own souls.

The three men smoking on the lawn made neither sound nor movement until the last echo died away.

There was a scuffle in the passage, a stifled wail of anguish was heard, and the drawing-room door flew mysteriously open.

Three white-clad culprits were discovered huddled together on the mat, too panic-stricken to attempt flight.

The sobs of Kitty resounded.

"We came to listen to the music," said the trembling voice of Rosaleen, "and—and Kitty has had an accident."

"It wasn't an accident—it was Charlotte," wailed Kitty. "She always spoils everything. She would open the door to look through the crack, and then shut it again without telling me; and my finger was there, and it hurts most dreadfully bad."

Mrs. Trethewy stepped forward with such wrath in face and gesture that Mr. Brett hurriedly interposed.

"If it was my music that fetched them out of bed, ma'am, the best thing I can do is to take them right back this minute," he said, and lifted the weeping Kitty very gently from the ground, where she was nursing the injured finger in a paroxysm of woe.

"I cannot think of troubling you, Mr. Brett. Listening to the music, indeed! A nice excuse. Charlotte, how dare you?" said her angry parent.

"I didn't make excuses," said the weeping Charlotte. "I didn't want to hear the music. I thought he would never leave off. I hoped he was going to play tricks with the piano, that's why I peeped. I am always unlucky. It was Kitty's fault for putting her finger in the crack."

"Charlotte—if you say another word!" thundered her mother; but Charlotte waited not for the completion of the sentence. She turned and fled across the hall and up the staircase in her white night-dress.

Little Kitty, concerning herself no further, snuggled close to the young American's shoulder, within the bend of his encircling arm, and pillowed a soft wet cheek against his clean-shaven face.

"If you'll allow me, ma'am, I'll carry this bad child upstairs. I expect she's had enough of listening at doors for one night."

His tone was soothingly deferential, and Mrs. Trethewy's attention was distracted by the sudden entrance of the uninvited parson with her husband and the Vicomte, so that Mr. Brett was enabled to cut short her protestations without difficulty.

He moved swiftly through the doorway and up the stairs, with his frail burden tightly clasped, and a hand to spare for Rosaleen's guiding fingers.

They entered a bare room, faintly lighted by the young May moon, which shone through the uncurtained windows.

Charlotte, her round head ornamented by curl-papers above her frightened eyes, was already in bed.

"Is ma coming?" she gasped, in unaffected terror. "Why—it's the man from America carrying you. Oh, Kitty, you are always the lucky one!"

"A queer kind of luck," said Mr. Brett, sternly, "for you to go squeezing her most to death in the door-jamb."

He deposited his burden tenderly in her cot, covered her up with careful, unaccustomed hands, and turned as though to go.

"Aren't you going to do *one* trick," shrieked Charlotte; "and me that have never seen you do anything at all."

Mr. Brett paused, and appeared to consider. Then he crossed to the side of Charlotte's bed.

"I can't do much of a trick at this time of night," he said, "but I can get a few chocolate drops out of those curl-papers, I believe."

In a breathless silence of hope and expectation he extracted three, and handed them round to the company.

"Do many people know how to do that in America?" said Charlotte, in awestruck tones.

"We make a speciality of getting something out of nothing in those parts," said Mr. Brett.

"I would like to live there," said Kitty, plaintively.

"I wouldn't," said Rosaleen. "There's no kings and queens in America."

"Haven't you a queen, like us?" said Charlotte.

"We haven't any need of one in particular; all women are queens in America."

"And are all little girls princesses?" said Kitty, admiringly.

"I guess they are, most all," said Mr. Brett.

"How very nice," said Charlotte, accepting this admission as a curious historical fact. But Rosaleen smiled

up in the face of Mr. Brett, who now stood beside her bed, which was nearest the door, and he smiled back at her.

"It was nice of you to carry Kitty," she said gratefully. "Say thank you, Kitty. You know you liked Mr. Brett to carry you."

"I liked him to carry me," said Kitty, obediently; but she added an unexpected afterthought of her own, "I liked it because he speaks so funnily, that's why."

"*I* meant to ask him about that. *Why* do you speak so funnily?" asked Charlotte, earnestly.

Mr. Brett paused, and spoke more funnily than ever, in a very nasal tone.

"I guess it's to let you know I'm an American that I'm obliged to talk that way," he remarked at last.

CHAPTER V

In place of the small brown house which had been the former residence of the Copp family, a palatial red-brick and white-faced mansion now towered over the Monksbere woods.

Sir Gregory Copp had left the paternal roof as a boy, to join the business of a distant cousin who had already acquired a considerable fortune in trade.

He had the good luck to please his relative, and the good sense to work hard and pay attention to business on his own account.

In the course of time he became first his cousin's partner, and eventually his heir; and thus fortified by capital, as well as by knowledge and experience, he ventured upon important speculations in the branch of industry which he best understood.

His courage was justified by success, and Sir Gregory Copp found himself at fifty an enormously rich man, with leisure before him which he intended to devote to the service of his country and the improvement of his social position.

He made the small brown house in which his fathers had lived and died the nucleus of the collection of fine buildings which represented his country residence; stood for Parliament, and, being elected, made haste to connect himself by marriage with one of the leading families in the West of England.

Sir Gregory was excessively proud of the antiquity of his own race, but he was conveniently oblivious of the fact

that the Copps of Monksbere had hitherto belonged to the humbler class of yeoman farmer.

His grandfather had touched his cap to George Trethewy's progenitor, and his grandmother had curtseyed to the squire's lady; but Sir Gregory had no idea how faithfully these details were remembered, and how often alluded to by his neighbours.

He avenged himself, quite unconsciously, by patronizing the Trethewys when he came down from London. He asked them to dine at Monksbere when no specially important people were staying in the house, and he did not dream of accepting their invitations in return.

Sir Gregory tried so hard to be well-bred that his wife had some ado to keep pace with him. He was so gracious in manner and speech that people asked each other if old Copp imagined himself to be a royalty, and resented his well-meant but excessive condescension.

Perhaps for this reason his only son was gruff and blunt almost to rudeness. Sir Gregory despaired of making Odo as popular as he desired his heir to be; and believing that example was better than precept, he redoubled his own efforts to be a model of politeness.

His wife was a cold-mannered, indolent woman, who was equally bored and bewildered by her husband's determination to please the whole world. She was large and slovenly of figure, with prominent light eyes and forehead, and a sallow complexion.

Sir Gregory had mistaken her vacant stare and uninterested manner for signs of high breeding; but to the intelligent onlooker these symptoms betrayed only too clearly that Lady Copp had inherited a feeble brain and an exhausted vitality.

Fortunately her husband was possessed of so much superfluous energy that an idle partner suited him very

well; he treated his wife with deference; watched anxiously for every occasion to supplement her coldness to his constituents by his own civility; kept an eye on her visiting list, and engaged a secretary to conduct her correspondence — a precaution the more necessary since Lady Copp's orthography left much to be desired.

Under these circumstances the lady of Monksbere had nothing to do but to grumble, to lie on the sofa, and to study her own and her bull-dog's health; and fortunately these occupations happened to be peculiarly congenial to her disposition.

She was always willing, however, to appear at her own entertainments, though she did not organize them; dined out whenever Sir Gregory informed her that she was engaged to do so, and left cards according to the lists prepared for her; so that she imagined herself an exceedingly overworked woman, and that he owed his social position, which improved every year, entirely to her; and Sir Gregory, being very good-humoured, was perfectly willing that she should think what she chose.

She did not dislike her husband, and she was proud of having presented him with a son and heir, for she was by no means in her first youth when Sir Gregory made her his bride. But beyond the agreeable fact of his existence, Odo brought very little actual pleasure to his mother. Since she had no more sons, she lived in constant terror of some accident depriving him of life, and Sir Gregory of an heir to the peerage he was determined to obtain. Odo belonged to the adventurous order of boy; he resented intensely his mother's efforts to keep him from school and from all active exercise or sports which might lead to disaster.

Thus the mother and son were by no means in complete accord; nor was Odo's personality particularly sympathetic to either of his parents.

He was square built, sturdy and thick-set of figure, and decidedly plain of feature. His hair was of the blackest, and matched his eyes; he had inherited his mother's pallor of complexion, and his father's thick eyebrows. But his expression, at once determined and rather cross, was all his own. Nobody could call Odo handsome or agreeable looking; but on the other hand nobody could deny him a certain manliness, and the evident sincerity which underlay his gruffness of speech entailed respect.

The manners and temper of his heir, however, blinded Sir Gregory to the sterling qualities which Odo nevertheless possessed; and which his mother was incapable of appreciating even if she had discovered them.

It would not have consoled her in the least, when she was suffering from the boorishness of her spoilt boy, to reflect that he had never been known to utter a falsehood nor make an excuse.

Though he grumbled at the excessive precautions taken for the preservation of his own health, and habitually disregarded all injunctions concerning the same, yet he bore pain without a murmur when he was overtaken by those ills of the flesh or breakages of bones which only sons are no less liable to suffer than other people. Though his training, and the knowledge of his own importance which was continually thrust upon him, might have bred vanity and selfishness in many breasts, yet Odo was free from both these vices. He was ready to share his advantages with anybody who came in his way; he thought meanly of himself when he thought at all; and he preserved a whole-hearted admiration for his cousin Conrade, who beat him at games and was more proficient than himself at every kind of sport.

But his mother had no sympathy with the heroic virtues of truth, courage, modesty, and generosity; and would

cheerfully have exchanged them all for a little outward civility from her son.

Since an eminent physician had once declared that companionship was essential to Odo, she had hit upon the expedient some years since of adopting an orphan nephew of her own to be a playmate for him.

This course possessed many advantages. It gained her credit with her own relatives, who had not hitherto been impressed by the generosity of Lady Copp; it brought her into touch with some noble and distinguished members of her late brother-in-law's family, whom she was exceedingly anxious to know, and who were quite willing to be friendly so long as they were not asked to provide for their young relation; and last but not least, it pleased Sir Gregory, who liked to be benevolent when he saw any prospect of reasonable benefit to himself as well as to the object of his kindness, and who hoped that association with Conrade might improve the manners of his vexatious heir.

For, by a strange freak of fate, young Conrade Waldron possessed in his own person all the qualities that would have made him an acceptable son to both Sir Gregory and Lady Copp.

He was a singularly good-looking boy, slight and tall, with fine dark eyes, and a ready smile and quickness of wit.

He was so clever that, fortunately for himself, it was found impossible, as he grew older, to educate him jointly with Odo.

The constantly changing tutors were apt to neglect the dull son of the house, and to concentrate their attention upon the brilliant but penniless nephew.

Lady Copp quarrelled continually with Odo's tutors, because Odo was backward and idle in his work, and surly in temper. But as she contented herself with reproving

the masters and continued to indulge the pupil, her son's disposition naturally profited nothing by her wrath. Odo saw one exasperated teacher depart after another with indifference; and reiterated constantly his demand to be sent to school, which his mother continued to deny. The tutors, strangely enough, though they generally left Monksbere on the worst possible terms with Lady Copp, were usually sorry to part with their refractory and dull-witted charge.

They probably realized that his training was largely responsible for his faults. "Master Odo's bark is worse than his bite," said the wise old stud-groom who had taught the heir of Monksbere to ride.

The two boys were curiously fond of one another, but though Odo admired Conrade, he made no attempt to imitate him. He was, in fact, at once too strong and too sincere to desire to imitate any one; and he only wished two things intensely—first, to be allowed to go to a public school; and secondly, to enter the Army.

This was to be Conrade's destiny, but for his heir Sir Gregory held different views. A University education was necessary, Sir Gregory thought, for a statesman, and a statesman he had determined to make Odo, in spite of his want of manner, want of ability, and want of inclination.

Young as he was, Conrade realized the hopelessness of his uncle's fond schemes for Odo; and was bitterly conscious that, had the same chances been offered to himself, he was capable of taking full advantage of them, and of rising to the dizzy heights on which, in imagination, Sir Gregory beheld his heir already perched. But Conrade was obliged to keep his ambitions to himself. Sir Gregory paid for his schooling and made him a moderate allowance; and though he often pointed out to him that his prospects were exceedingly poor, made no promises to ameliorate them.

The height of his ambition for Conrade appeared to be that he should pass through life respectably and never fall into debt. A young man who had no inheritance to look forward to, Sir Gregory said, could not be too small in his ideas. Save for Conrade's near connection with the Duke of Alnoth, and his relationship to Lady Copp, Sir Gregory would have suggested a business career for him rather than the Army. But birth has its privileges; and in India, as Sir Gregory pointed out, a young man could live on his pay, though Conrade's would always be supplemented by an allowance whilst he continued to behave himself and do well—an allowance proportionate rather to the poverty which accepted than to the wealth which offered it.

Conrade's brilliant successes at school were attributed to the lad's desire to prove his gratitude to his benefactor, who glowed with self-satisfaction when the master's reports came in, but who experienced no thrill of admiration for the young hero whose talents, industry, and energy inspired those reports. Lady Copp made no suggestions on behalf of her dead sister's son. She did not dislike Conrade's society, and was glad at times that her own family, as typified in him, should seem superior to her husband's family; but at others she resented his personal advantages over her son, when their relative importance differed so greatly.

She made constant and fretful allusion to the subject when alone with Sir Gregory.

"It is very hard, Gregory, that Odo should be so much shorter than Conrade, when I am so very much taller than you."

Sir Gregory received this allusion to his low stature good-naturedly. He had learnt to expect neither courtesy nor logic from his wife, so he forbore to point out that Conrade's father had been almost a giant, and her own

sister considerably taller than herself. He merely replied in his suave tones—

"Our son is very strong and well made, my dear. I do not see that you have anything to complain of."

"He may be strong, but he does not look it. He always has a pasty face, and is nearly always grumpy, and very often low-spirited."

"You should send him to school, Virginia," said Sir Gregory, who frequently advocated, though he dared not enforce, this course of action. "You see how much it has improved Conrade to go to school. And as he comes home none the worse for it, I do not believe that Odo's health would suffer."

"Conrade takes care of himself; he is not reckless like Odo. If anything happened to Odo, Sir Gregory, where would you be?"

As Sir Gregory was too polite to make the obvious retort, his only resource was to repeat his advice.

"I wish you would send the boy to school. Let him return with Conrade after Christmas. I would give Conrade a hint to watch over him as much as possible."

"I cannot see that there is any hurry. He is only thirteen; and though he has outgrown the need of companionship, he has plenty of playmates. I am sure the Trethewy children come to tea often enough, and make plenty of noise."

"It is Odo who makes the noise," said Sir Gregory, who was more conscientious than his wife. "I don't deny they are nice little creatures, but it is not the society of little girls that Odo requires, but the discipline of school life."

"If I thought it would make him as good-tempered as Conrade, of course I would send him," said Lady Copp, discontentedly, "but I am certain that good temper is a question of health. People who never suffer find it easy to

be pleasant. Besides, some accident is sure to happen if I do send him. Only the other day a boy was drowned at Eton. It is absurd to have a river so near a school."

"We are not obliged to choose Eton," said Sir Gregory, patiently.

"I should not care to send a son of mine to any other school than the one my brothers went to, Gregory," said Lady Copp.

"Very well, my dear. I put him down for Eton a long time ago, as you are aware. Let us send him there by all means, and let it be as soon as you can make up your mind to part with him."

"Talking of the Trethewys," said Lady Copp, whose attention was never long enchained by one subject, "I hear Mr. Trethewy is ill again. Dr. Luxton told me this morning that his lungs are not in a fit state to bear the damp of this climate."

"I think all this new-fangled talk about climates is great nonsense," said Sir Gregory. "George Trethewy's father and grandfather lived here all their lives, and so did mine. From year's end to year's end they never dreamt of going away. In those days people died of old age. It's my opinion they die now of too much gadding about. A man in George Trethewy's position ought not to travel. If he had always stayed at home and looked after his family and his property as he ought, I doubt if we should have heard a word about this necessity for a change."

Sir Gregory was severe, for though on principle he spoke ill of no man, yet he held a very poor opinion of George Trethewy. Gossip assigned to the Squire of Southerleigh a past more lively than creditable, and Sir Gregory's unconscious jealousy may have inclined him to lend a more willing ear than usual to such reports; but they filled his righteous soul with abhorrence, and in proportion to the

strictness of his own morals did he despise the weakness of his neighbour.

"Because you are as strong as a horse yourself, Sir Gregory," said Lady Copp, "you think everybody else is the same. Personally I know how my health would suffer if I did not go to the Riviera, and escape the early spring winds."

Sir Gregory did not like to remind his wife that she had managed to exist very comfortably for five and thirty years before her marriage without taking any such precaution, so he replied in soothing tones—

"That is a very different thing, my love, and there is no reason why you should not go to the South when other people do. But this is only the beginning of winter, and George Trethewy is not in a position to afford travelling about. He had better stay at home, where he can be ill at much less expense to himself, and far less trouble to his excellent wife."

"I shall call and inquire how he is," said Lady Copp.

"A very kind thought. I am sure it will gratify them very much," said her husband, warmly; and he was really surprised, for suggestions of civility to their neighbours seldom emanated from his wife.

Lady Copp, however, was inclined to like Mrs. George Trethewy, whose excessive humility disarmed her pride, and whose flattery was so direct that it penetrated even the dullness of Lady Copp's understanding.

She enjoyed a compliment just as sincerely as a cleverer person, when it was sufficiently broad to be unmistakable.

Mrs. Trethewy was of the same mind as Sir Gregory on the subject of her husband's illness, and for some time firmly opposed his doctor's desire to send him abroad for

the autumn and winter months. She pointed out that since he had withstood one winter in England, he might very well try the effects of a second. But his sudden and severe illness presently scattered her arguments.

A sharp attack of congestion of the lungs left George Trethewy far more delicate than he had ever been before. A second doctor was called in, and Dr. Luxton's opinion of the gravity of the case was emphatically confirmed. The Squire took fright on his own account, and decided upon an immediate departure for Madeira, with or without his wife.

Mrs. Trethewy had no intention of allowing him to depart alone; but she was torn by conflicting interests. Her economies at the Court were in full working order, her household and family entirely subjugated, and her balance at the bank very low. It was agony to contemplate the abandonment of her post at such a moment, but she was obliged to face the necessity for doing so. She hurriedly concocted plans for shutting up the house, dismissing the servants, and placing the children at a cheap school in Plymouth which Charlotte had once attended as a day boarder. Even this could not be done for nothing; though she reflected joyfully that the school was very cheap indeed.

Travelling she knew to be expensive, for her husband had no taste for economy in his personal comforts. They had spent their honeymoon abroad, and his extravagance had appalled his bride.

Mrs. Trethewy was distracted. Her cherished scheme for repaying herself by degrees the mad outlay induced by her second marriage, appeared impossible of fulfilment.

The Vicomte's chance had come.

He begged so piteously to be allowed to contribute towards the expense of the illness, that George Trethewy relented, and allowed his eager wife to accept whatever the

Vicomte chose to offer. Old Patrick then approached Mrs. Trethewy, tremblingly and diplomatically, on the subject of the cheap school.

For a time she resisted all argument and entreaty. If the children stayed with the Vicomte, as he suggested, they would regain, she declared, all their molly-coddling habits of which she had but just broken them. Charlotte had done very well at school, so why should not they? The Vicomte included Charlotte in his invitation, but she remained as adamant, and he was at his wits' end.

At this juncture Kitty obligingly fell ill with a cold; and as she was insufficiently clad to resist the autumn damp, and in a low state of health from being very indifferently fed, the cold settled on her chest and threatened her lungs.

Mrs. Trethewy was obliged to sanction the installation of Pélagie as sick-nurse, and the old Frenchwoman returned triumphant to the Court.

Dr. Luxton seized the opportunity of venting his own feelings, and aiding his friend, the Vicomte, by declaring his conviction that Kitty was absolutely unfitted for school life.

He spoke so forcibly of her extreme delicacy, which was indeed sufficiently obvious from her appearance, that the Squire was moved for a moment from his usual attitude of indifference.

Perhaps the dark eyes of the little anxious Rosaleen appealed to him yet more strongly, than the doctor's vehement denunciation of the results of the hardening system, on Kitty's fragile frame and constitution.

They were his dead wife's eyes which looked at him from Rosaleen's colourless olive face, and it was her voice he heard when his first-born put little lean arms round his neck and whispered passionately—

"Oh, daddy, daddy, if you send me away from Kitty I shall *die!*"

He was moved to decree that both the little girls should be left at Honeycott, in charge of their grandfather and their old nurse.

Mrs. Trethewy was obliged to console herself with the reflection that the arrangement would certainly save money. But, concerning the unlucky Charlotte, her mother stood firm.

Charlotte must be hardened, and the weeping damsel was packed into the old station cab with her minute trunk beside her, and old Broome outside on the box, and despatched to Domaford station *en route* for Plymouth.

The tender-hearted Vicomte stopped the vehicle as it was rumbling past the door in his garden wall, and, although he had already said a public and official good-bye to Charlotte, took this opportunity to bestow upon her a parting exhortation and a packet of bonbons and cakes.

His great heart swelled when he found her seated alone, very forlorn and miserable, opposite her shabby little trunk. It had not occurred to her mamma to accompany her child to the station.

He tried to soothe her grief, and the terror that possessed her at the idea of facing the ordeal of school life alone.

"If Rosaleen was coming too," sobbed Charlotte, "I should not mind in the least. I should be only too glad to get away from ma. The punishments at school can't be much worse than hers. But it's the lessons I'm afraid of. Rosaleen would have helped me, she likes lessons, and everybody makes a favourite of her. But they're sure not to like *me*, nobody ever does. It's not my fault."

In her extremity she forgot her awe of the Vicomte, and poured forth her inmost heart, proving herself to be no such fool as he was accustomed to imagine her.

There was so much truth in her declarations that old Patrick knew not how to answer her. Her personality was not an attractive one ; but that she should be aware of this fact filled him with pity and dismay.

Even the poor child's sorrow was uninteresting to contemplate, since she expressed it principally in noisy and unromantic sniffs.

His sympathy took a practical form. Moved by a sudden impulse, he filled the pocket of her scanty serge frock with all the loose silver he had about him, and her astonishment at this lavishness instantly closed the fountain of the sufferer's tears.

Charlotte was so anxious to count the handful of coins which the old gentleman had thrust upon her, that she could hardly contain her impatience during his final blessing and admonition, and it was with a sigh of relief that she found herself alone again, in the slow-moving cab, and able to pour her treasure into her lap. She had the joy of discovering that she was the possessor of seven shillings, four sixpences, and a threepenny bit. Poor Charlotte had never owned so much money all at once in the whole course of her existence, and her joy was proportionate to her good luck.

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. Trethewy had no intention of being absent from the Court for more than a few months, and she became almost reconciled to leaving home when she reflected that she would be able upon her return to engage a fresh staff of servants at lower wages, and with humbler ideas. She paid off and dismissed all the old ones, save Broome and his wife, who were to be left in charge, and she personally superintended the shutting up of the greater part of the house before she left.

Her last look at it was one of regretful triumph.

Everything had been thought of; every possibility carefully provided for—except one.

As she drove away in the station cab by her husband's side, it did not occur to her that he might never see his old home again; though it occurred to every servant and villager who had seen him since he rose from his sick-bed. One and all shook their heads ominously over his altered appearance.

They beheld him thin, white, and transparent, with great blue eyes in hollow sockets, and a dry incessant cough. They said openly to one another that there was death in his face. But Mrs. Trethewy was unused to illness, and had no such grave apprehensions. She thought her husband nervous and fidgety about his health and his own comfort, as indeed he was.

Old Patrick bade his son-in-law farewell, and thanked him with emotion for leaving his little ones in his charge.

George Trethewy was softened by illness, or by an uneasy sense of impending doom, for he showed something like a remorseful and shamefaced gratitude during their parting interview.

"I say, look after little Kitty; you know," he said awkwardly, and his hectic colour deepened, "she's—she's beginning to look confoundedly like me, isn't she?"

"No," almost shouted old Patrick; and then began to stammer, "Not that you look so very bad—now. But the doctor says her constitution is perfectly sound."

George laughed weakly, but the tears stood in his blue eyes.

"I'd take her with me, only—well, *you* know. She'll do better with you and Pélagie. They used to look very different, poor little beggars, usen't they, in the old days. I say——" He looked away and spoke more awkwardly than ever, so that his embarrassment communicated itself even to the simple Vicomte. "I know you've done a lot for me in the past, and been good to the poor little kids and all that, and you'll see—I shan't forget it. I ain't so ungrateful as you've always thought, but it riles a fellow so to be short of money——" He ended with a meaning laugh.

"God bless you, George. You shall have what you want," said the Vicomte, in trembling tones. "You know my friend in America repaid me——" He faltered and hesitated.

The Vicomte had kept faithfully his resolution of saying nothing to his son-in-law about Mr. Brett's lucky investment.

"I don't want to know what he paid you," said George, with his mirthless laugh. "I dare say Maria's got hold of

most of it. She keeps me pretty short. But it's true enough, as she says, that my debts have swallowed up poor little Charlotte's inheritance. A beastly shame, of course. But what's a man to do? She should have thought of that before she married me. And it was all hers legally; not that I'm the sort of fellow to rob widows and orphans. I'll make it square somehow. Lucky I haven't got a son, isn't it? I've told her I can make it right if she'll trust me. I wish I could save up money like you do, though."

"It will come to the same thing—the same thing," said the Vicomte, entreatingly. "For me, you know very well that I have nothing left to care for on earth but the children. Nothing on earth. Take care of yourself, you shall want for nothing that I can give you. Remain in the South until you have regained your health."

"I ought never to have risked it by stopping here," said the young man, and his brow darkened. "It was Maria's doing. She hates travelling. I can't think why she insists on coming, but I suppose I ought to have somebody to look after me while I'm in this state. I feel beastly. This place is so confoundedly damp in winter, that's why. I shall be all right as soon as I get into the sunshine."

Old Patrick thought more kindly of his son-in-law because his conversation during this last interview had not been so exclusively confined to business as usual.

"He does not express himself well; his wits are not quick; but he thought of the children. He knows I love them," thought the poor Vicomte, and made excuses for the young man so obviously and pitifully stricken by a fell disease.

On the day of their father's departure, Rosaleen and Kitty, with their little belongings, were transferred to Honeycott, where Pélagie had prepared their rooms with

eager hands, crying for joy at the prospect of beholding them established under their grandfather's roof.

Kitty, rolled in blankets, was carried across the kitchen garden in the arms of old Broome, and deposited in the white cot prepared for her.

Bright fires blazed in the night nursery, and in the upstairs sitting-room which opened into it. Pélagie's work-basket already ornamented the table by the window. Chéri-Mignon, the white cat, was asleep on the hearthrug; *bon papa's* musical-box was playing; and a jar of scented arums, cut in the little greenhouse, stood on the broad sill of the low window beneath the sloping ceiling.

The damp autumn world was shut out. From the hill-side the burning red of the beeches, and the pink coral branches of the wild cherry, emerged from white wreaths of mist. The robin sang loudly on the leafless fig tree in the garden below.

Down in the warm kitchen the Vicomte moved with slippered feet over the glowing tiles, which reflected the light of the fire. He busied himself in the preparation of hot coffee, chicken broth for the little invalid's supper, and a *tisane* for her cough.

The *quatre-quarts* were baking in the oven, and Johnny poured foaming new milk into the red earthen pitcher.

All was snug, merry, and comfortable.

Rosaleen ran to and fro with brown cheeks flushed and dark eyes sparkling; the children's voices and glee brought cheerfulness to the little homestead, and the Vicomte's heart swelled with joy and thankfulness.

In the early spring of the following year came news from Madeira of George Trethewy's death.

Little Rosaleen, greatly awed, was sent across to Southerleigh Court, to comfort Mrs. Broome, her father's

old nurse; who alone, perhaps, of all who knew him, was broken-hearted at his loss.

She sat on Mrs. Broome's black silk lap, and put her arms round that solid neck, wishful to console her for the excessive grief she was too young to share; though she cried for company, trying in vain to realize that she would never see "poor papa" any more.

Rosaleen's father had never counted for much in her life, and had been a complete stranger to the thoughts and feelings of his children.

She was a loyal little creature, however, and thought as tenderly as possible of his memory, sitting beneath his picture on his old nurse's lap.

"Poor papa," said little Rosaleen, instinctively searching for words of praise. "I think he was sorry when Kitty was so ill. He wouldn't let her go away to school. He used to carry Kitty on his shoulder a long time ago when she was little. And he gave me my catty-book just before he went away, and wasn't angry when I tore off the bit of the black cat's picture in it by accident."

"Doan't 'ee never blame yure vather no mar vur nart he niver did," sobbed Mrs. Broome, incoherently. "Poor bye, tu be tuke tu his prime, wi'out a word of gudebye tu me as brart him up. But well I know what wude come of her cheeseparing and scraping, which he niver was use tu in this world. And what t'will be like wi'out him, the Lard he knows, but not me, nar yit Broome."

A sudden terror seized Rosaleen.

"Mrs. Broome, will Kitty and me have to come back here when *she* comes home, do you think?" she said, turning pale.

Mrs. Broome considered.

"Yure grandpapa'll know, var zure. Do 'ee ask him, Miss Rosaleen, and tell me what 'ee du zay. T'will be

arl what your vather have arranged var, zurtain zure. I wuden wonder but what her'll git this place vor her life-time, and keep you and Miss Kitty out of yure own var many a long day. Still, t'wude be yure grandvather'll have the best claim on yu, his own flesh and blood. I can't tell like whu t'will be tu have the care on yu. T'won't zurely be she! Oh, well var Broome and me 'as Cuckoo Cottage be our own, and a home waiting for us, if her's to be missus tu Southerleigh. Though how I shall iver climb the hill tu git tu 'un I can't till."

"It isn't so *very* steep," said Rosaleen, anxiously. She was sorry for Mrs. Broome, and she could not imagine how the Court would exist without her. "I'm afraid everything will go to rack and ruin," sighed old-fashioned little Rosaleen, shaking her head and wrinkling her anxious brow.

"Don't tark of it," sobbed Mrs. Broome. "But yu'll be running up with yure young legs so often as ever yu can, Miss Rosaleen, var to see me. Thank Heaven, me and Broome has putt by enough to live on, and something over to fly with." She wiped her eyes. "Here be I, tarking and planning, and my bye dead befar his time, and not his own child nar yet his old nurse anywhere nigh him."

She fell to relating her memories of George Trethewy's boyhood, a process which afforded her consolation, though it cannot be said that her description presented an especially attractive picture.

"He were a sickly little bye, and neither me nor his mamma scarce dared think us would rear him at arl. He had eyes and hair like Miss Kitty's, but I'll not deny he had none of that darling's bright ways. I can zee 'un now, in his little green tunic, wi' his buckle belt tu his middle, a-whinin' and a-pinin'. All vor catching the flyses and the beetleses in his butterfly net, and puttin' into the little paper boxes I had tu make vor 'un. And his little shoulders

humped up as niver was. He were a dridful bye for moaning and mumping. Peter Grievous I used vor to carl 'ee. And stuffin' hisself from marn till night. But 'ee loved me, poor bye, and he wasn't niver much of a one vor loving. And zee what a vine vellar he growed up. And such a picture as him and yure poor mamma made together. Him zo vair, and her zo dark. But her was a proper buty, wi' arl her brown skin."

She put Rosaleen off her knee, and led her to the piano.

"There be her portrait a-smiling down over her piano. I vancy I can see her playing zo butivule, and the master a-leaning over her whilst her zang them old Irish zongs her was zo vond on."

And she lifted up a quivering voice in the effort to give Rosaleen a specimen of her mother's song, but broke into tears before she had come to the end of the first line—

"Oh, there's not in the wide world a valley so sweet."

The holland-shrouded piano in the drawing-room brought no pleasant memories to Rosaleen, but a vivid recollection of a miserable little girl with a pigtail, practising her scales in a fireless room, with chilblained fingers; gazing through her tears at the sweet face smiling on the wall, and wondering if her mother could really be so happy in heaven whilst her little daughter was so wretched on earth.

The Vicomte was presently made aware of the form which his son-in-law's gratitude had taken when he learnt that George Trethewy had appointed him sole guardian and protector of his children.

He was so overwhelmed with relief that he received the news, that their natural inheritance had been alienated from Rosaleen and Kitty, with comparative indifference.

The neighbours and villagers did not, however, share the Vicomte's calm, when it became known that Southerleigh and its surrounding acres, which had been owned by the Trethewy family for so many generations, were now to pass into the hands of strangers.

The Vicomte pointed out in vain that the estate had been actually paid for by Mrs. Trethewy, who had expended its full value in clearing it of mortgages and putting it in repair. Justice, he declared, had compelled his son-in-law to act as he had done, and to pay his debt by the only means in his power. It was next to impossible to make any one see the matter from this point of view.

Rosaleen and Kitty, the last of the old Trethewys, were regarded locally as disinherited princesses.

The conditions of George Trethewy's last testament indeed gave satisfaction to no one; least of all to his widow, whose frequent reminders of his indebtedness to her first husband's fortune had evoked it.

She had lamented incessantly the wrong done to Charlotte's future, by the expenditure of the fortune that would one day have been hers by every moral and natural right; but she did not altogether rejoice when she learnt how George Trethewy had made amends to Charlotte.

He had promised his wife that justice should be done, and his obligations honourably discharged, and he had carried out his promise.

Perhaps the Squire had taken a somewhat malicious pleasure in leaving his landed property directly to his injured step-daughter. In any case, Mrs. Trethewy realized with dismay that her reign over Southerleigh must come to an end in a few years' time, when Charlotte would attain her majority.

Her mortification was great; nor was it lessened by the further explanation that her responsibilities as Charlotte's

guardian were now shared by the family lawyer, James Luxton, of Domaford, who was sole executor of the will, and trustee jointly with the Squire's old friend and crony, John Webber, for the Southerleigh estate, and who refused to evict the respectable farmer now renting the land, or to permit the letting of the Court, which was, indeed, expressly forbidden by the will.

There were many vexatious restrictions in that carefully planned and intricate document, which had been drawn up by George Trethewy himself during the last weeks of his life, and signed in the presence of the doctor and of the British Consul at Madeira.

Mrs. Trethewy, when her somewhat slow intelligence had at length grasped the details, flew into a rage, and declared to James Luxton her belief that her husband had been in no fit state of health to make a will at all; but when he dryly replied that in that case his old friend had died intestate, and that his daughters would thereby immediately benefit to the extent of two-thirds of his property, and inherit the remainder upon his widow's decease, she withdrew her statement somewhat hurriedly, and remarked that as the doctor attending him was of a different opinion, she supposed there would be no chance of being able to substantiate her own.

Her interviews with Mr. Luxton generally ended in disappointment on her side, and exasperation on his; and she was eventually driven to the conclusion that her most satisfactory and economical course would be to withdraw herself altogether from Southerleigh—decline to take up her residence at the Court, in which case she was not to be responsible for the maintenance of house and garden—and content herself with receiving and putting by as much of the income of the estate as she could get, without expending a penny on the place in return.

Perhaps the painfulness of the associations, and the dulness of the neighbourhood, had something to do with Mrs. Trethewy's decision. It certainly appeared to be a wise one. In any case, it was thankfully accepted by Mr. James Luxton, and hailed with relief by the Vicomte.

Since she was denied importance at Southerleigh, she bethought herself that it was still in her power to obtain it elsewhere, and she determined to return to her native town, where she had many relatives and acquaintances, among whom she would now be able to shine, as the widow of a county gentleman and the mother of an heiress.

She therefore set about hiring a handsome villa in the outskirts of Plymouth, sent for the carriages and horses from Southerleigh, and settled down in her new home with the resolve not only to impress her surroundings, but to do so at the least possible cost to herself.

It now became necessary for the Vicomte to explain the situation to Rosaleen and Kitty as best he could.

"Do you mean *our* house belongs to *Charlotte?*" Rosaleen said incredulously.

"What if it does, ma mignonne? It was built but a short time since, comparatively. Within a hundred years. The roof which now shelters thee was the cradle of thy race," said the Vicomte, sentimentally. "This thy father remembered and alluded to in his will, knowing well that it would one day be thine own."

"But Charlotte wasn't papa's child. She had nothing to do with us," said Rosaleen, turning scarlet.

"My nursery and my toy-cupboard is mine," said Kitty, defiantly. "I shall go over to Southerleigh and lock them up, and tell Mrs. Broome Charlotte isn't to touch them."

"*Petite vipère!* Is thy nursery here not as beautiful?"

"It is more beautiful, but we don't love it so much,"

said Rosaleen, with candour, and she looked into her grandfather's face wistfully. "How can I love a room what's got no memories?" she asked, in reproachful tones.

"And it's not *nearly* so big as our old nursery," said Kitty, bursting into tears.

"One must not expect gratitude from children," thought the Vicomte, with rueful countenance. "These little angels are given to us to cherish—to reverence their innocence—to lay the foundation of qualities not get grown, but which they will presently acquire under our fostering care, for the benefit of their contemporaries and their descendants. With this reflection must parents content themselves. It is certainly a great deal."

CHAPTER VII

ROSALEEN and Kitty grew up in a curious little world of their own, ruled by *bon papa* and Pélagie; a world in which flowers and animals and inanimate things played almost as great a part as human beings, and which knew hardly any changes beyond the changes of the seasons.

For many a long day, Romeo and Juliette, the doves; Corney and Tiny, the rabbits; Chéri-Mignon, the white cat; Ramor-Ramor, the nigger doll; and Bon-bec, the Vicomte's pet toad, were almost equally dear and cherished friends. When Chéri-Mignon took to evil ways, and went rabbit-hunting in the woods, when Ramor-Ramor was mislaid among the cabbages during a caterpillar hunt, and Plon-Plon, the old horse, dropped down dead from old age, their tender-hearted playmates and companions were inconsolable.

Time alleviated these misfortunes. Chéri-Mignon presently reappeared, looking much younger than before, and, in fact, strangely altered in many respects; but the children were easily persuaded that the trip had rejuvenated their favourite.

Plon-Plon was replaced by a pony, which they took it in turns to ride, aided by Johnny's advice and assistance; and the charms of Ramor-Ramor palled when his small soaked body was eventually dug up, and handed over to his erstwhile lamenting owners.

As soon as the Vicomte was satisfied that the health of

his charges was thoroughly re-established, he turned his attention to their education.

A timid, elderly lady, reported to have kept a school in her youth, was induced to walk over from Luscombe on fine mornings, to impart a little of her supposed knowledge to Rosaleen and Kitty.

The Vicomte communicated his theories on the subject of discipline to Mrs. Quick, and she lent an attentive ear to his discourse, though she had very little idea what he was talking about.

"I who speak to you know that it is a wrong principle altogether, that of punishment, which governs the world still as in the Dark Ages. If a plant is weakly and badly grown, does the gardener therefore ill-treat it? *Quelle idée!* Does he not rather lavish upon it the most loving care, and make the conditions of its life as easy as possible, to ensure its well-being in the end? So with these little ones, madame, which are entrusted to our care by the *bon Dieu.* If *we*, from whom they take example, are to be angry, what are they likely to be but angry also? If we vent our rage at our own failure to impart information to the partially developed mind—the inexperienced understanding—of a little child, by ill-treating its body, how much are we advanced on our way? What are we teaching it but to one day ill-treat others in its turn?"

Mrs. Quick was very far from wishing to ill-treat any one. She was a perfectly gentle, amiable person, and though she knew very little, she knew that little well. Her pupils diligently copied her beautiful Italian hand-writing, learnt to draw the map of the world correctly, and to say the multiplication table, and the dates and names of the kings and queens of England without a mistake either forwards or backwards; and to the latter feat she appeared to attach a peculiar importance.

Here, unfortunately, her list of attainments ended. Rosaleen and Kitty could not tell the principal imports and exports of their native country, nor work a single problem in Colenso, nor struggle through a German exercise, though Charlotte's infrequent and ill-spelt letters informed them that she had painfully climbed to these heights of culture at her Plymouth school.

But, on the other hand, out of lesson time, Rosaleen and Kitty acquired not a little useful knowledge.

They learnt from Pélagie to cook and sew with the dainty accuracy peculiar to Frenchwomen, who stand aghast at the needlework and the dishes which pass muster outside their beloved country.

They read French with their grandfather, and knew by heart the season's routine of work in the flower and vegetable garden. They pruned the fruit trees under his watchful eye and guiding hand, and helped Pélagie to gather and preserve the fruit.

Also they imbibed something of the Vicomte's simple philosophy and charitable spirit; but these are lessons unconsciously learnt, and more fully applied in later life than during early youth.

The manners of the little girls became curiously old-fashioned, since they naturally imitated him. Their grandfather took pains to teach them picquet and dummy whist, which they played very intelligently, and with as much solemnity and courtesy as two polite old gentlemen at a club.

Pélagie chuckled admiringly when she beheld these three playmates seated gravely round the wicker table in the porch on summer evenings, or in the study on winter nights, absorbed and happy over their rubber, with a little heap of ancient mother-o'-pearl markers beside them, and the green light from the shaded candles illuminating the

Vicomte's silvered head and the fresh faces of his little ones.

Rosaleen's habits of poring over every book she could obtain, or of indulging in continuous day-dreaming, had at first somewhat distressed the Vicomte; but growing accustomed to her ways, and finding her always a serious and sensible little companion, he presently ceased to lament them, and contented himself with restricting her visits to the library at the Court within certain limits. Rosaleen was so uniformly well-behaved and gentle that the Vicomte was obliged to reserve any powers of scolding that he possessed for the vagaries of Kitty.

Here his sense of humour stood in his way, for Kitty by no means relished being taken to task by her grandfather, from whom she expected perpetual indulgence and admiration.

"We often talk of my faults, *bon papa*. Now let us discuss my good qualities," she said to him reproachfully.

"Diable! si tu en as!"

"I must have *some* good qualities." She reflected anxiously, and produced the result with triumph. "I am an early riser."

The Vicomte suddenly recollected a distracted summer dawn, when Pélagie had found her charge missing from her cot, and, after disturbing the household, had found her tranquilly devouring green apples in the orchard.

"Mettons cela de côté," he said ruefully.

"I am industrious," said Kitty, and hung her head, remembering she had spent the previous afternoon busily transplanting some valuable seedlings from a wooden box in the hothouse to her cherished but overcrowded garden where they had been discovered dead in the morning.

"Certes," said the Vicomte, sternly.

The seraphic blue eyes flooded.

"I am affectionate," said Kitty, in a trembling voice, and her lovely mouth quivered.

"Oui, mon ange; oui, ma poulette, tu l'es," roared the Vicomte, overcome with remorse; and he folded the golden head to his yellow waistcoat.

"Give me a stout lad, and a stick in my hand, and you will see how I shall chastise that ruffian," he said ferociously to Pélagie, who reproached him for his soft-heartedness; "but a little girl, assez délicate pour la mettre dans du coton, with the handkerchief of a doll held to those eyes, blue as heaven! Am I a monster? I consoled her. I avow it. What would you?"

When Kitty offered him a kettle-holder, into which many tears and some garden mould had been worked with the pattern, he accepted it meekly, as a token, doubtless, of complete reconciliation.

Though they respected their grandfather's authority, loved him dearly, and were inordinately proud of the glories of his past career, Rosaleen and Kitty yet soon grew to prefer their own judgment to his; and, though he was wiser in some ways than all the inhabitants of Southerleigh and Luscombe put together, they felt obliged to regard him with a tender indulgence, which they did not accord to others, because he was so very simple.

When the angelic trustfulness of childhood is first invaded by a suspicion that grown-up people are not infallible, the young usually begin by mistrusting the old and wise. A little later in life they doubt their contemporaries, and last of all themselves; but by this time they are already middle-aged.

Rosaleen and Kitty did not doubt the wisdom of Sir Gregory Copp, but this was because they knew very little about him except that he was in Parliament, which argued,

as they supposed, unusual capacity of some kind; and also they held him in awe because, when they went to tea with Odo and Conrade, Sir Gregory patted their shoulders. They disliked this form of endearment excessively, but they felt that it denoted his consciousness of superiority, and the conviction communicated itself to their own youthful minds.

They did not doubt the wisdom of Lady Copp; first, because she seldom spoke to them at all; and secondly, because she stared vacantly over their heads when she did address them, which implied that even during her words of greeting her thoughts were soaring far above their limited comprehension. Nor did they doubt Conrade and Odo, who made no secret of the fact that it was a condescension for boys to play at all with girls younger than themselves.

But they often gave good advice to their grandfather, humoured his weaknesses kindly, and took pains to be amused at things which he thought funny.

The extraordinary thing about *bon papa* was, as Kitty remarked despairingly to Rosaleen, that he was always being surprised at something.

The first primrose surprised him regularly every February or March or April, according to the date when the first primrose took it into its head to appear.

The first crocus that opened its golden cup to catch the golden sunshine surprised him no less; and he was annually astonished, on measuring Rosaleen and Kitty, to discover that they had grown.

"Does he expect us to be little girls for ever?" said Kitty, in disgust, to her sister.

When they presented him with a pair of socks that did not match—one being tightly knitted by Kitty, and the other very loosely by Rosaleen—*bon papa* was so amazed at their achievement that he almost fell into a fit; though he

must have seen them at work upon the gift for months previously, under Pélagie's constant supervision.

Once when Rosaleen had already gone upstairs to bed, he called to her so excitedly to come down into the garden, that she thought he had really found something extraordinary at last; but it was only the mignonette coming up just where he had planted it.

Still they loved their grandfather too warmly and sincerely to display the slightest impatience at his eccentricities. They only smiled, or shrugged their shoulders—as sensible people do over the amiable follies of the very young or the very simple; and simple the Vicomte undoubtedly was, though he could no longer claim to be young.

The little garden sloping to the south, and open to the sunshine, was a world in itself to old Patrick, and even to Rosaleen, who had more sympathy for his love of nature and his fondness for meditation than her sister.

Kitty was not given to meditation, and valued flowers chiefly as decorations for her room and her person.

Privately she thought her grandfather must be a little mad to take so much interest in a creeping line of ants crossing the garden path, heavily laden, yet pausing on their busy way to exchange unmistakable greetings; but it was only that he liked to explore the crannies of life.

She too liked the garden and the sunshine; but the green door opened into a brighter world yet, so far as Kitty was concerned, who carried no wide realms of imagination within her pretty little head.

The narrow lane outside the high thatched wall led to many humble homes where Kitty was welcome. She was too sociable to refrain from visiting her neighbours, and enjoyed a liberty somewhat unusual to her age in roaming

the fields and orchards and woods of Southerleigh. Kitty was wilful, and her grandfather over-indulgent; he contented himself with prohibiting any excursions beyond the boundaries of the Southerleigh estate; and rested secure in his certainty that every man, woman, and child in the neighbourhood knew and loved her.

She regarded the red and white glories of Monksbere with contempt, rather because it was the local fashion to resent its obtrusive size and newness, than because her own eye or taste was in any way offended.

"They are nouveaux riches," said the little maid, elevating her chin. "Sir Gregory is not the Squire of Southerleigh and Luscombe, and he never will be. It was papa, and now it ought to be *us*, whether Charlotte has one of our houses or whether she hasn't."

"'Tis her that has the land, though," said old Broome, shaking his head; and local opinion was with him. The owner of the rich Southerleigh acres was the lord of the manor of Southerleigh and Luscombe, wherever he, or in this case she, might choose to reside. Kitty climbed the hill often to Cuckoo Cottage, and laughed at its steepness; she discoursed to the old Broomes; and to Weston, the gardener, and his wife, who had replaced them as caretakers at the Court. It is to be feared they did not discourage her boasting, and rather admired her spirit.

Kitty had other admirers and partisans of her own besides the Broomes and the Westons.

On the road to Domaford was a modern-built villa, where resided a family whose existence had never been recognized by the inhabitants of Southerleigh or Monksbere, though the members of it were of considerable importance in Domaford society.

The eldest son, Percy Hortop, cast eyes of admiration upon pretty Kitty whilst she was but a little girl; and as

she grew older she met him more frequently during her rambles than her unsuspecting grandfather would have approved. At first their greetings were of the slightest, but as Percy increased in age he increased also in boldness, and he not only waylaid Kitty upon her walks, but left little notes and parcels where she would be certain to find them, thus initiating her into the secrets of a vulgar flirtation.

Kitty was at first frightened, then flattered, and finally attracted. She had the grace to be ashamed of herself, but admiration was meat and drink to her.

She replied sometimes to the notes, which were, to be sure, innocent missives enough; and found more pleasure in composing the answers than she expected. She meant nothing; she was not in love with Percy Hortop; but, like many little maids in their early teens, she was in love with love; and the foolish notes that were ostensibly addressed to Percy Hortop were in reality addressed to that ideal lover who existed only in Kitty's imagination; but Percy was not imaginative, and he was very much flattered by the pretty and poetical warmth of their contents. The letters constituted almost the whole of their intercourse, for Kitty was shy and elusive; her fancy for "the Hortop boy" would quickly have evaporated had she heard very much of his conversation, and with all his boldness he was not bold enough to follow up his letters and try to make love to her in person, as an older lad might have done. Nevertheless, he vowed that he would certainly one day marry the little disinherited princess of Southerleigh; and he told her so in a letter whereof the contents enchanted Kitty, who was no judge of spelling and not particular about grammar.

There was no one to exercise vigilance over the child, nor to warn her of the folly of such premature playing with sentiment, and Kitty was privately exultant that

she had a secret all her own that Rosaleen knew nothing about.

Still, when Percy went back to school or to college, it cannot be said that Kitty thought much about him—beyond being relieved, when she heard Conrade and Odo scornfully allude to him as a *smug*, that they were unaware of her acquaintance with the young gentleman thus described.

She had many other friends of whose intimacy she need not be ashamed; and she was a pet with the old lawyer, James Luxton, and with his brother the doctor, who took her for many a drive in his dog-cart into Domaford and Remberton, where the shops held everything that Kitty's soul had yet learnt to desire.

Rosaleen preferred reading and dreaming to visiting and shops.

On the daisied turf, freshly starred in spite of the efforts of Johnny and his mowing machine, she would rest for hours, sheltered by the thatched cob walls which had guarded her long childhood, and watching the white scented clusters of the acacia swinging lightly overhead in the summer wind, against a deep blue sky; or wandering through the cool north orchard behind the cottage, or climbing the grassy slopes beyond; she would throw herself down among the clover, in the shade of the hedges where the wild rose trailed below the elder-flower; or in the open, where the stiff bracken stood in patches, like miniature forests, and the foxglove hung silent rosy bells above the fern.

Or at night, when Kitty was dancing round the kitchen, beseeching Pélagie to add cakes and *pâtisserie* to the evening meal, which they shared, French fashion, with their grandfather, Rosaleen would steal out into the late summer darkness, where the Madonna lilies, gleaming whitely in

the dusk, gave her a pleasant thrill of ghostly apprehension. Such thrills were pleasant only when the open door of the cottage displayed a safe refuge near at hand, in the glowing lamplight, the warm red tiles, and the homely old brown oak staircase, which led to that white nest, her bedroom.

Rosaleen was allowed the run of the Southerleigh library by the special favour of old James Luxton, who indulged her whenever he could. The library contained a very good collection of old books, and was quite innocent of modern additions.

She had early picked out the fiction and most of the poetry; but as she grew older she attacked volumes of more formidable appearance, and found them no less engrossing. Thus she imbibed a certain familiarity with the manners and customs of the past, and obtained a more than passing acquaintance with famous names, histories, and events.

The coarseness of some early writers conveys no meaning to the innocence of a child, and Rosaleen learnt little evil and much good from her desultory reading.

The worst thing that happened to her was that she tried her eyes over small print and in half-lights.

Her grandfather let her alone. He believed that her ardent and susceptible spirit had suffered greatly under the harsh dominion of her step-mother, which had changed an open and confiding nature into one timid and reserved. She was full of her own little thoughts and dreams, but very docile too, and performed willingly her lessons and other duties; and the Vicomte was too old and too wise to attempt to force her confidence. He knew that the thoughts of one generation are not easily transmitted or explained to another.

It was enough that the child was now content.

Philosophy can teach no wiser lesson, and Rosaleen

learnt from her grandfather to take great pleasure in little things; which was the secret of his own constant serenity.

He knew no distinctions in honest labour, and thought himself as well occupied in polishing his shoes as in reading his favourite Molière, or writing to his Paris bankers.

The Vicomte wrote more letters than formerly now, and looked very queerly at Kitty once, when she remarked that she would like to be rich, and wear a quantity of diamond and emerald rings, several bracelets, and a different hat every Sunday, like Lady Copp.

"Perhaps thou too wilt be rich one day, mignonne," he said.

"Have you a great deal of money put by, *bon papa?*" asked Kitty, with that artless mixture of frankness and shrewdness that characterized her.

The Vicomte laughed heartily. "Perhaps not a great deal. I have, however, a little mine in Spain."

"A gold mine!" said Rosaleen, awestruck.

But when their grandfather replied that it was only copper, and that it did not all belong to him, they lost interest in the little mine in Spain, and thought no more about it.

CHAPTER VIII

"Odo!"

"Well?"

"How would you define a prig?"

"A prig," said Odo, vaguely, "is a fellow who wants kicking."

"What for?"

"For being a prig."

"It seems useless to ask a boy for explanations," said Rosaleen, with dignity.

"A boy indeed!" said Odo, sublimely conscious of his two years' seniority.

They sat under the fig tree in the sunniest corner of Honeycott, where the scarlet and gold nasturtiums ran riot over the wild border which was the Vicomte's especial delight.

It was the last day of Odo's holiday, and he had come to bid his neighbours farewell; and, incidentally, to present them with a brace and a half of partridges and a couple of rabbits, the spoils of his own gun during his last day's sport.

Odo, though he was glad and proud to have attained his wish, and had already spent two happy years at that public school which was the object of his desires, was yet not insensible to the charms of the holidays, and regretted his coming departure quite as sincerely as Rosaleen herself, his faithful companion and partisan, regretted it.

Kitty had returned from a blackberrying expedition, and having stained her light cotton dress with the fruit, and

torn her petticoats in the brambles, was being scolded and put to rights upstairs by Pélagie. Through the low open window of the little bedroom the old woman's voice could be heard admonishing her tall nursling at great length, and perfectly unheeded by Kitty, who from time to time looked out in *déshabille* and waved cheerful greetings to her grandparent below.

The Vicomte, in his loose brown holland suit, was carefully collecting the seed-vessels from the dead Canterbury bells, and pausing before every rose-tree to search for marauding insects. He moved slowly, but time was cheap at Honeycott. It glided unnoticed over the Vicomte's head. If his leisure were boundless, so were his occupations unending; and he never found the day too long. There was not a creeper, nor a climbing rose, nor a spreading fruit tree in the garden, that he had not nailed up with his old fat hands, or that knew not the discipline of his pruning-knife.

The month of September was advanced, and the garden was brilliant with dahlias, yellow and light red and deep crimson. The gladioli blazed in the sunshine, and old-fashioned marigolds, like oranges and lemons, glowed in the borders. The Vicomte loved bright colours, and especially red and yellow and orange. He said they made sunshine in shady places when the English climate withheld it. The warmth of colour cheered his simple soul, and he cared not if it shone from the rarest blossoms or the veriest weeds.

He regarded botany as an almost sacrilegious study, though he sorrowfully admitted it to be an interesting and, in some respects, a necessary one.

"Let us learn what we must of herbs and their properties," he said; "but let not the holy places of a garden be desecrated by a dull classification of detail."

Sir Gregory Copp remarked innocently that it was curious old M. de Nauroy should succeed so well with his flowers, since he knew practically nothing of horticulture, and kept only a garden-boy.

The steep hill formed an almost insuperable objection to the Vicomte's visiting the garden and hothouses of Monksbere, now famed throughout the county, and headed by a scientific gentleman with a fabulous salary.

Old Patrick described Sir Gregory Copp somewhat sarcastically as a catalogue gardener, who knew nothing of the nature or the spirit of that exquisite order of creation which he classified so glibly.

But Sir Gregory imagined that his rare and gracious visits, and requests to examine his "charming little garden," must gratify the Vicomte immensely. He had made a hobby of his glass-houses ever since he had retired from business, and he entered into the subject as thoroughly as he did into every subject which occupied any portion of his attention.

It was one of the disappointing characteristics of his aggravating son and heir, that Odo took no interest in the range of hothouses that would one day be his own; nor in the small army of gardeners who formed the staff of the great man resident at Monksbere.

He would not accompany his father round the half-dozen newly walled, carefully planted, and heavily labelled enclosures called the kitchen garden of his home; nor utter delighted exclamations at everything he saw, as Sir Gregory did; nor call up and compliment the nearest blushing representative of the head gardener, who seldom appeared in person, but was presumably hidden in his snug red-brick house, wrestling with fresh schemes for the beautifying of the extensive pleasure-grounds.

Though he was quite as fond of fruit as a healthy boy

usually is, Odo considered pleasure of any kind too dearly bought that must be purchased by civil speeches; and he made none at Honeycott, where he could get as much fruit as he chose for the trouble of gathering it, and where Rosaleen usually saved him all necessity for conversation.

He contented himself with as few words as possible, as he rested beneath the shelter of the old fig tree, on this hot September afternoon; whilst he condescended to enjoy not a few of the ripe purple figs which hung over his head in tempting profusion.

Though Odo would have scorned to admit that he was tired by a long day's tramp through the turnip fields, after partridges, with Conrade and a keeper, yet he was in reality just sufficiently fatigued and overheated, besides being depressed by his coming departure, to enjoy the refreshment of rest and companionship in the quiet little domain of Honeycott.

"I *really* wanted to know," said Rosaleen.

"Well, I'm telling you, aren't I? A prig is a sort of fellow who gives himself airs because he thinks he knows better than other fellows."

"But if he *does* know better?"

"He ought to keep it to himself, or get his beastly head jolly well punched."

"Do you think if he knew other people were wrong, and he was right, he still ought to keep things to himself for fear of being called a prig?"

"Not for *fear* of anything," said Odo, promptly; "but because it's rotten bad form to force your own beastly opinions down other people's throats."

"At that rate," said Rosaleen, dreamily, "you would call all reformers prigs."

"So they are. I hate people who meddle; why can't they leave things alone?"

Rosaleen was silent for a moment.

She was driven to confide in Odo, *faute de mieux;* but it could not be said that he was a particularly sympathetic auditor.

Still, he was going back to school to-morrow, and if he were rough, he was always sincere; and, above all, there was nobody else.

Conrade was so old that Rosaleen considered him very nearly—and he considered himself quite—grown up; and Kitty was too young. There was only Odo, such as he was.

So she began again—

"Suppose a person was trying with all their might to be perfect, not for their own sakes, nor because they wanted to be considered superior; but simply in order to be *fit* to help other people; suppose such a person had a very great idea—a scheme, which, if it could only be carried out, would influence nations, and make the world a different place;—would you call that person a prig?" asked Rosaleen, with the tragic solemnity of her fourteen years.

She awaited Odo's answer tremulously, for she looked upon him as a representative of the great world outside this remote corner of the west.

"You little goose!" cried Odo. "How could one person do anything of the kind?"

"Everything that has ever been done has been done by one person," said Rosaleen. "Every idea that has ever led to anything has originated in the brain of an individual."

"I suppose you think you will be the individual," said Odo, with fine satire.

"I would like to be," said Rosaleen, defiantly. Though she was gentle, she was not spiritless, and his opposition

roused her. She looked at him with indignant hazel eyes, her brown cheeks flushed.

"Ha—ha—ha! Influence nations!" laughed Odo. "A girl that has never been outside her own village!"

"Joan of Arc was a village maid," said Rosaleen.

"The idea of comparing yourself with Joan of Arc!"

"I did not. And ridicule is not argument," cried Rosaleen, in mortified tones.

"I never argue with girls. They know nothing of logic," said the provoking Odo.

Rosaleen shook her dark curls over her face to hide the tears she could not help, and the young gentleman's heart was softened. After all, Rosaleen was a good sort; she was never cross when he chaffed her. Odo quite honestly believed that he was thus describing correctly his short answers to his little, earnest companion.

"Well, go on. Rot away. What else?" he said; this being his fashion of intimating that he was graciously disposed to hear more of her confidences.

"I was very foolish to say a word. The minute one talks of one's real feelings, they seem to become foolish and common, and lose all their—sacredness," said Rosaleen, vehemently. "One should keep one's thoughts to one's self, but I *do* long sometimes to tell mine, and I know you don't tell any one what I say to you."

"I'm not a sneak," said Odo, briefly.

"No," said Rosaleen, wiping her eyes. "You are unsympathetic, but you are as safe as a house. Now, Kitty is very sympathetic, but she is *far* too young to understand how *much* more important thoughts and ideas really are than *things*. And a—a person of my age," said Rosaleen, pathetically, "gets very tired of being treated like a baby by grown-up people, or one might naturally try to confide in them. But there it is, *they* talk and we have to listen,

always. If we *try* to say anything, what do they answer, except 'Ah, my dear, you will think very differently when you come to my time of life'—or something like that."

"I don't know. *I* never try to talk to them," said the practical Odo. "I just listen when they jaw, and get away as soon as I can."

"Mrs. Quick says it regularly at least twice a day," said Rosaleen, dismally. "Of course there's grandpapa. *He* would listen gladly enough, poor darling; but as he's rather deaf, it's so difficult to talk to him without Kitty and Pélagie, and even Johnny, hearing too. Besides, things that one *shouts* never seem the same. However, I *really* thought that Mr. Webber was interested in something I was telling him only yesterday, but at the end he said, 'You're a funny little soul, Rosaleen, full of your own thoughts. *I was just like you when I was your age.*'"

Odo burst into a loud guffaw.

"Good old Jack Webber. He must have changed above a bit. I hope you won't grow up like him. What were you telling him then?"

"He was saying that the less educated people were, the less tolerant they were of new ideas."

"Everybody knows that."

"So that made me draw the induction," said Rosaleen, who naturally preferred to use the longest words she could think of, "that in time, when *everybody* is educated, everybody will learn to examine other people's opinions without prejudice, and thus understanding each other's points of view, will grow to think more and more alike on all points."

Odo whistled.

"Well, I like your cheek. Holding forth to old Webber like that. The fact is, you ought to have been sent to school, Rosaleen, where everybody thinks alike already.

You go moping and reading in that old library at the Court till your mind is full of maggots."

"Odo! Nobody thinks alike all over the world," said Rosaleen, leaning her chin on her hand to gaze at him with wide, anxious eyes.

"And you want to convert everybody to your way of thinking," said Odo, with a grin. "So does everybody else want to. Better join a missionary society."

"You are exactly like Mr. Webber," said Rosaleen, in despair.

"That I'm not."

"That is where my conversation with him ended."

"A very good job too."

"My idea—had nothing to do with missionaries, or with converting people,—or with anybody's religion," said Rosaleen, ignoring the interruption. "Some day, perhaps, every one will think alike on that one great subject; but now it is the one on which nations and people and individuals differ. A subject on which only great and inspired souls can speak, and on which others had better be humble and hold their tongues, and not rush in where angels fear to tread," said Rosaleen, growing red with indignation. "But meantime—*meantime*—there are things—everyday things—on which the greatest and noblest and most civilized people of every age have thought alike, and that is what gave me my idea."

"I'm blest if I know what you're driving at," said Odo. "But you'll go dotty, Rosaleen, if you go bothering your head like this about things you know nothing about. *What* things?"

"Oh, Odo, and you are a boy, and study the classics, and learn all about subjects which I can only read to myself," said Rosaleen, reproachfully. "Didn't the old Romans and Greeks and Persians teach their sons to speak

the truth, and be just, and brave, and temperate? Don't Christians and Jews and Buddhists and Mohammedans alike honour virtue and despise vice, and isn't that a common ground where we can all meet?"

She looked at him expectantly.

"Well," said Odo, unimpressed.

"Well," said Rosaleen, humbly. "I thought that, after all, people all over the world are very much alike at heart. Every history one reads proves it. They all want to live in peace, and to see their children good and happy and prosperous; and it breaks one's heart to read about wars and persecutions and tortures, and people killing each other——"

"That's it! You read too much; I said so," broke in Odo.

"But it's true," cried Rosaleen, passionately; "and then my great, great idea came to me. It's so simple that I dare say you will think nothing of it. But great things have always been simple, after all. I thought that all the people who loved virtue and hated vice, all over the world, of every nation and every religion, could form a great Universal Brotherhood."

Odo burst out laughing. "Is that all?"

"Don't laugh at me," said Rosaleen, piteously. "It is so easy to laugh. Somebody has laughed at new ideas ever since the world began."

Odo became grave.

"Now look here, Rosaleen," he said, "don't you go fancying you're going to hit on new ideas at this time of day. There's nothing new under the sun; and though, of course, it doesn't matter what you say to *me*, I shouldn't like you to go making an ass of yourself to anybody else, talking unpractical rot like that."

"It is not so unpractical as you think. I have thought

it all out," said the poor little reformer; for at fourteen the soul is not easily dismayed by the magnitude of its own purpose, and the management of the world seemed almost a simpler thing to Rosaleen than the conning of a dull, daily lesson. "I have made a list of the few fundamental things that all teachers in *all* ages—that I can find out anything about—have agreed are wise; and I thought that the vows of the brotherhood could be founded on those; so that all civilized people could join, irrespective of creed or race, and help each other in the cause of peace and justice all over the world."

"Yes, I dare say. It all sounds very fine, but it won't hold water," said Odo. "Now, let's talk common sense for a bit, for I must be off in a minute or two."

Rosaleen tried to swallow her mortification, and vowed to herself for the hundredth time that she would keep her thoughts to herself in future.

It was not thus that she received Odo's confidences, when he told her, as he not infrequently did, his own schemes and hopes for himself; but these included no plans for the regeneration of mankind, and were exclusively bounded by his personal desires and idiosyncrasies.

He wished to go into the Army, and his father opposed his wishes on this point, and hoped that his son might fill his seat in Parliament later on, when the coveted coronet should have descended upon Sir Gregory's expectant brow.

Though Odo was sufficiently obstinate to withstand his father's wishes, it was quite uncertain whether he were sufficiently clever to carry out his own.

His progress at school gave no warrant for the supposition that he could pass the necessary examinations.

He uttered some well-known lamentations on the subject to Rosaleen, and though she had heard all he had to say

many times before, she did not listen with less sympathy upon this account.

"I don't see why you shouldn't do what Conrade did," she suggested.

"I dare say you don't," said Odo, derisively. "That is a good one! A fellow like Conrade, who can do anything he chooses. Passed first into Sandhurst out of the whole boiling. If I had Conrade's brains it would be simple enough."

"Oh, Odo, if you would only think less of cricket and football, and more of your work, I am quite *sure* you would get through," said Rosaleen.

CHAPTER IX

"I DECLARE!" exclaimed Charlotte, stepping out into the garden with a laugh. "It's the same old view."

Rosaleen laughed too, feeling much inclined to retort that it must be the same old Charlotte who could be inspired to make such a remark.

It was the close of a perfect April day. The west wind had died away as the afternoon advanced, and the air was mild and still.

The cooing doves called sleepily to each other from the big cedar to the lofty elms on the lawn. Sheets of white violets sweetened the springing grass beyond the ha-ha, and the daffodils were thick in the borders.

The brown trees, yet bare of leaf, threw long shadows over the emerald meadows and red plough-land, which stretched away to the distant blue hills beyond Domaford church.

But if the landscape were unchanged, the same could not be said for Charlotte.

Rosaleen and Kitty regarded their old playmate with respectful curiosity.

She had a smart, erect, and somewhat square-shouldered figure, and was dressed in the extreme of the fashion. She had a pinkish complexion, and scanty fair hair elaborately frizzed. Though her light eyes were too prominent and her under-lip hung a little open, which gave her a weak expression, she was rather a nice-looking girl; and she smiled upon her step-sisters with an affectionate warmth, to which they were not slow to respond.

Miss Charlotte Fish was now one-and-twenty, the absolute owner of Southerleigh Court and its unencumbered acres, and of a very fair income besides. Misfortunes, it is supposed, never come singly, but one piece of good luck may be said to lead to another with equal probability.

Her father's unmarried brother, one Nicholas Fish, selected Charlotte as his heiress from a number of equally deserving and far poorer nephews and nieces, simply because she was a landed proprietor, and therefore, in his eyes, a personage of importance.

When he died, he left her every penny he had in the world, so that she would now be able to live in her country house without pecuniary assistance from her mother, which would not otherwise have been the case.

Mrs. Trethewy urged Charlotte in vain to sell the house and estate as soon as she should have legal power to do so; she had no desire to return to Southerleigh herself, and she feared that her daughter would be tempted to spend her whole income there, instead of putting it by. Mrs. Trethewy's love of economy had increased with years.

But Charlotte was obdurate on this point, and her mother was obliged to choose between allowing her to take up her residence at the Court alone, or following her thither. For respectability's sake, she decided upon the latter course, and, sorely against her will, she accompanied Charlotte to Southerleigh.

The heiress might almost be said to have changed places with her formerly autocratic parent. She was fully aware of her own importance, and took, perhaps, an exaggerated view of the duties and privileges of her position.

It was Charlotte who now gave orders, in a loud authoritative voice, and her mother who remained meekly in the background.

This curious reversal of the previous order of things almost petrified Rosaleen and Kitty.

Mrs. Trethewy loomed in their recollection of the past as a terrible and awe-inspiring figure.

It was astonishing to find her only an elderly over-dressed little woman, scarcely reaching Kitty's shoulder in height, and altogether destitute of any authority over her large and determined daughter.

Kitty's memory was less vivid than Rosaleen's, and she was too eager to follow Charlotte into the garden and hear what she had to relate, to have much attention to spare for the step-mother she scarcely remembered.

But as Rosaleen paused before leaving Mrs. Trethewy alone in the drawing-room, things forgotten, or only half understood formerly, sprang freshly into her mind.

Yet, as she looked, the bitterness almost instantly died away and gave place to pity.

Rosaleen did not exactly reflect that she was young and pretty, and healthy and happy; and that Mrs. Trethewy was unlovely and unloved; but nevertheless it was an unconscious recognition of these facts which caused her to thus swiftly put aside her secretly cherished grievances and forgive the tyrant of her childhood.

She was no longer sorry for herself, but a little tender pang in her heart reminded her that she was still sorry for Kitty.

A shadow had been cast across the bright path of her little sister's infancy; and though Kitty had emerged with spirits unclouded, the effects were yet visible in her almost ethereal delicacy; and Kitty was very near indeed to Rosaleen's heart—nearer than anything or anybody in the world.

But Kitty was safe now; though she was delicate, her health was completely restored. She was free and fearless; the queen of the little kingdom of Honeycott.

A triumphant thanksgiving shone for one moment in Rosaleen's bright dark eyes, and a splendid flush burnt on her brown cheeks, as she met that hard inquisitive gaze.

After such conflicting emotions it was certainly a relief to turn to Charlotte.

"Doesn't it seem funny for us all to be together?" said the owner of Southerleigh, with a laugh. "You and me grown up, Rosaleen, and Kitty very nearly."

"I am seventeen," said Kitty, indignantly.

"That is true, and you are the tallest of us all. But your hair is down your back still, and your education *can't* be finished when you've never had a proper governess, nor been to a boarding-school. Lucky you! I don't suppose you've even been bothered with dancing lessons or gymnastics or anything, have you? And though, of course, your French ought to be good, I don't believe you've learnt as many languages as me."

"We can speak English," said Rosaleen, pointedly.

"Why, of course you can. It's your own language," said Charlotte, opening astonished eyes. "However, for my part, I'm thankful enough to be done with it all. Nothing would do for ma but to pack me off to that German school. You know her old way; anything to be rid of me. No sooner did I leave school in Plymouth than off I had to go to that outlandish country. Ma went poking about to watering-places meanwhile, and at last she had to let me join her. She's quite got over her dislike of travelling now, and knows how to do everything on the cheap. We stayed at lots of hotels; and met heaps of people. I believe ma hoped I should get married," said Charlotte, giggling, "so that she wouldn't have to come here. She wanted me to sell the place, but of course I wouldn't. I was determined to come here and try how I

liked it, directly I was twenty-one. Why, what's the matter, Rosaleen? How red you have turned."

The matter was that Rosaleen had caught sight of a little brooch that fastened Miss Charlotte's collar.

It was but a humble ornament of small value; but Rosaleen recognized it immediately. It had belonged to her mother, whose little store of trinkets had been kept in her father's dressing-case, and sometimes exhibited to his children; and, with the rest of his personal belongings, it had passed into his widow's possession.

Rosaleen clenched her slender fist unseen. Then she reproached herself for this manifestation of resentment. How should Charlotte know?

"Nothing is the matter," she said. "Go on."

"Well," said Charlotte, "I thought how glad you'd all be to know this dead-alive old place was going to be brightened up. Ma is in a fine state about my extravagance, and all that, but I have always longed to be *on my own*, and I shall give garden-parties, and dances, and all sorts of things. Won't it be funny? Me living here, and you at Honeycott? and us calling on each other, each in our own house? Why, how you and Kitty look at each other. What is it? Surely you can't be such dogs in the manger as to want *both* places!" cried Charlotte, thunderstruck.

Rosaleen's mood changed, and she laughed outright.

"And we used to be like real sisters," said Charlotte, reproachfully.

"Oh, Charlotte, can't you *see?*" said Kitty, stamping her foot. "After all, its papa's home, not *your* father's. And Rosaleen and I are the last of the Trethewys of Luscombe. How can we be pleased to see somebody of another name—a—a Fish, in fact"—Kitty laughed hysterically—"living here; and everything, even our mother's picture, belonging

to you, to do what you like with? It's not that we don't like you—that we don't remember we're a kind of sisters; we know it's not your fault. But how can you expect us to be pleased?"

"It was my father's money that paid for everything!" cried Charlotte. "Did you never understand that? Southerleigh would have had to be sold long ago, if ma hadn't paid all *your* father's debts; besides clearing off the mortgages and all. Ma has told me over and over again how she crippled herself. She's been pinching for years to make it up. Heaps of money that ought to have been mine one day went into this place. If that doesn't make it mine I don't know what does. If your father hadn't married ma, Southerleigh and all its contents would have been sold at his death; *you* wouldn't have got a penny. I'm sure I don't want your mother's portrait, or anything else that doesn't legally belong to me, but it *does;* and so I told Mr. James Luxton, when he began making senseless suggestions to me about books and pictures and things. He doesn't think of the gaps they would leave behind."

Her woeful face, with eyebrows comically arched, and lower lip quivering, turned from one to the other.

"Charlotte, we're not disputing for a moment that it all belongs to you," said Rosaleen, with dignity. "It was papa's will; grandpapa has explained to us that it was just."

"He will never get me to think so!" cried Kitty.

"But you can't expect us to be glad that our old home belongs to you, or to any one but ourselves," said Rosaleen. "Though, as you say, Honeycott is our home now, and we can't live in two houses; still——" She looked round at the lawn, where they had spent so many summer hours under the spreading cedar, both before and after her father's death. Her heart swelled. "We had better agree never to talk of it. It's yours now, and there's an end of it."

"But I meant to go over all the old places with you. You forget," said Charlotte, with something like a sob, "that it was here I had the only really happy time in my life. *I'm* fond of the place too, in a way. I shall never forget those two years when you and me and Kitty were so happy together; playing with the boys and all."

Kitty burst out laughing, but Rosaleen took Charlotte's hand in momentary compunction. The two dark years of her own childhood were actually the brightest spots in Charlotte's recollection.

"Oh, Charlotte, you must have been very wretched at school!" cried Kitty, with conviction.

"Wretched! I should think I *was* wretched," said Charlotte, with energy. "I don't say they were as severe as ma used to be. But you remember I never *did* mind having my ears boxed. I always said one got used to it. But lessons I never got used to, and me kept at school till I was nineteen. You don't know what it was like. All the little girls not up to my shoulder higher in class than me; and never what I call *really* enough to eat. And I always remembered you and Kitty through it all," she ended, in injured tones. "But I mean to make up for everything now. I've thought what feasts we'd have here. No more sending the strawberries and currants to market now. As I've told ma, once for all. She'll have to see us enjoying ourselves, whether she likes it or not."

"I'm sure I'm very willing to enjoy myself," said Kitty, with dancing eyes, "but it must be over something better than eating fruit, I hope, at our age!"

"I should think so. Though you'd understand my thinking first of that, if you'd been kept as short of nice things as I have all this time," said Charlotte, pathetically. "You know what ma's housekeeping is like. But let's talk of something more cheerful than that. Come upstairs, and

you shall see my things and the presents I've bought you."

Rosaleen and Kitty were both a little ashamed of the eagerness with which they ran indoors and upstairs after Charlotte; but presents had not come much in their way, and the very word had a delightful sound.

"I declare," cried Charlotte, stopping short as they passed the door of the linen-room, "if there isn't the very place we used to play robbers. Don't you remember?"

"I remember the last time," said Rosaleen; "Conrade and I were the lady and gentleman travelling in Italy, and Kitty our little girl, and Odo the band of brigands hidden among the precipices."

"And me the nurse; you remember you always gave me the worst parts," said Charlotte, in her old complaining tones. "And we all jumped from the top of one of those great high presses to the top of the next. How frightfully dangerous it looks now. I wonder I didn't kill myself. You're too young to remember my frightful accident, Kitty."

"Indeed I'm not," said Kitty, who still felt references to her youth acutely. "Odo was hidden behind the top of the window curtains on the last press, and he jumped out upon you, and you gave a loud scream and disappeared."

"I jumped short. I was always unlucky," said Charlotte, "and ma heard my screams, and rushed in and boxed my ears without waiting to find out if my leg was broken, which, if I had not been so fat, it might well have been."

"So the game was forbidden, and it was one of our best games," said Rosaleen, regretfully. "Why are you taking us into the best spare room, Charlotte?"

"It is not the spare room. It's mine," said Charlotte, with dignity. "I told ma I should take the biggest, and I

have. I've no idea of wasting the best room in the house on visitors."

Rosaleen and Kitty followed her, much impressed, into the room which they had been wont to see swathed in holland covers, and treated with almost sacred reverence. They wondered how Charlotte dared to sleep in the carved wooden four-poster, or to use the inlaid dressing-table with the nests of drawers and the full-length mirror.

There was white Dresden on the mantelpiece, and dainty porcelain ware on the washstand and writing-table. The windows looked across the garden, over the green meadows where the red Devon cattle were grazing, away to the woods where the turrets and towers of Monksbere rose above the tree-tops.

"The land is let, and it's going to stay let. There I agree with Mr. Luxton, who wouldn't let ma try and manage the farms for me, as was her first happy idea," said Charlotte, cheerfully. "I don't want to be bothered with business; my motto is enjoyment, and I mean to get my money's worth of it."

"Oh, Charlotte, how lucky you are! What a *magnificent* dressing-gown! But why did you choose this colour?" said Kitty, touching a purple satin garment with mingled awe and dismay.

"That's nothing. Only a tea-gown. And heliotrope is all the rage," said Charlotte. "I have several tea-gowns." She threw open the door of the best mahogany wardrobe and invited their inspection. "I made ma come up to London the minute the lawyers had done with me, when I came of age," she said triumphantly, "and there I shopped to my heart's content. She was in such a rage, but she could not stop me, for I had plenty of money."

"Three parasols, a pink and blue trimmed with real

lace, and a white with embroidery!" shrieked Kitty, in ecstasy, "and one, two, three—*five* hats."

"The lace is not real," said the practical Charlotte, "but it is not a bad imitation. I think real lace nonsense; sham looks just as well, and costs far less. The blue and pink parasols are my presents for you and Kitty. I remembered your colours, you see."

"It's very kind of you, Charlotte," said Kitty, with sparkling eyes. "I have always longed for a blue parasol."

But on nearer inspection she could not help perceiving that the blue and pink parasols were of a cheap and flimsy material, and very inferior to the white one Charlotte had purchased for her own use.

Rosaleen observed her sister's disappointment, and made haste to cover it by expressing her own gratitude as warmly as possible.

"That is the worst of Charlotte," she thought impatiently. "It all comes back to me now. It used always to be like that. Just when one thought one was fond of her or sorry for her, some petty meanness or insincerity too small to put into words would make the feeling all die away."

But Charlotte was delighted with her own generosity, and after busily opening and shutting the parasols, and pointing out the merits of her gifts, she turned in high good humour to her dressing-case.

"Look at this pearl necklace. It is not real; but no one could ever tell that. I bought it in the Burlington Arcade, and I would have got you each one too, only they were so much dearer than I expected."

"I should not care to wear jewellery that wasn't real," said Kitty, disdainfully. "And oh, Charlotte, what will be the use of all these beautiful things to you here? No one will ever see them. You have no idea how quiet it is.

And you *can't* wear silk dresses with trains in the gardens and lanes."

"Not wear them! Of course I shall wear them," said Charlotte. "Wherever one is, one must be tidily dressed. And these are nothing, *nothing* to what people are wearing now in London and at the seaside. Ma *did* go on about the dulness here, but, as I tell her, I mean to try and change all that. As soon as people have called on me I shall entertain. Ma says there were always lots of swells staying close by at Monksbere, and now Sir Gregory has become Lord Domaford, there will be more than ever. Of course I must be got up to the nines," said Charlotte, gleefully.

Rosaleen did not like to spoil Charlotte's obvious pleasure by expressing her doubts as to whether the inhabitants of Monksbere would be much affected by her intended hospitality; but Kitty seldom hesitated to speak her mind.

"The swells, as you call them, wear nothing but serge and plain tailor-made things when *we* see them walking about," she said mournfully. "We are never asked to Monksbere when there are big parties, nor in the evening, when, I dare say, they wear beautiful things."

"I've got plenty of tailor-made gowns if it comes to that," said Charlotte. "My tailor says they suit me particularly well, and I'm not dependent on Lady Domaford's invitations, for I have visitors coming to stay with me of my own!"

"What fun! Who are they?" cried Kitty, breathlessly.

"They are people I met at an hotel. Americans. And they're coming to stay here in the summer. They want to spend the season in London first; and besides, I'm not ready for them. I'm going to have the house all done up. And how do you think I came to know them?"

"I should think you introduced yourself to them—at *table d'hôte?*" said Kitty, in whom the spirit of sarcasm was finely developed for one so young.

"No, though we certainly *did* get to know a good many people that way," said the unsuspecting Charlotte. "But these people had private rooms and took their meals upstairs, so we couldn't. But I used to see them coming in and out, and we heard they were millionaires. That is why I wanted to know them. And the girl was so *wonderfully* dressed. Well, they had a man with them whom I recognized at once, though I dare say you wouldn't recollect him, unless you have seen him since. But *I* was eleven when he came to Honeycott. It was Mr. Brett; the man who did tricks."

"You talk as if you were Methuselah," cried Kitty; "of course we remember him."

"You may suppose how pleased *I* was to recognize anybody," said Charlotte, modestly. "He was standing in the hall, lighting a cigar, and I just went up to him and said, 'How do you do, Mr. Brett? I'm afraid you don't remember me, and yet you once took chocolates out of my hair.' I never saw a man so surprised."

"I suppose he thought you were mad?" said Rosaleen.

"No, he thought nothing of the kind. I introduced him to ma, and reminded her about his dining with us that night, and she was afraid he would want to be invited again, I suppose; for she was quite stiff and disagreeable until she found out *who* he was."

"And who was he?"

"Why, the relation of these millionaires, whom everybody in the hotel would have been glad to know. They had the very best rooms on the first floor; but it didn't seem good enough to them, for they were moving to a much grander hotel, and going to do the season properly,

they said. They are rolling in money, and as soon as they found out that ma and I were friends of Iron Brett's——"

"Friends!" said Rosaleen, colouring.

"Well, acquaintances, anyway, and I hope we are friends now," said Charlotte, with dignity. "They asked us to lunch, and took us out driving, and were as friendly as anything. They said they hardly knew any English people, and had never been over here before. So I showed them the photos of Southerleigh, and explained it was my house now, and Iron Brett asked lots of questions, and seemed quite interested about it all. I invited them to stay with me, the father and mother and the girl, Zoe Brett is her name, and she promised they would. She said she wanted badly to stay in a real typical English country house."

"I hope you told them that Southerleigh was quite a small unpretentious place," cried Kitty, "or they will be expecting a great house like Monksbere."

"I told them nothing of the kind. This is a very fine house indeed compared to Honeycott. I don't know what you *will* do when Mr. Brett stays with you there."

"We haven't invited Mr. Brett."

"But he's coming, for when I asked him to come here with Mr. and Mrs. Silas Brett and Zoe, he said he could stay with nobody but his father's oldest friend, the Vicomte de Nauroy; and Zoe told me she was pining to see the old gentleman, because she had heard such a lot about him from her uncle John. One would have thought your grandfather was quite an interesting historical personage from the way she talked about him, and Louis-Philippe, and I don't know what all. She said he helped her uncle John in Paris ages ago; but I don't see how he could, for her uncle John is a millionaire, and richer than old Silas, who is only the junior partner. When I told her how your

grandfather lived in a cottage with only one servant, she said it was just lovely of him. But she's romantic, and she's longing to meet you and Kitty, for I told her what a little duck Kitty used to be, and what nice times we had together."

"How old is she?"

"Eighteen. But she looks almost like a child; she is so tiny. Though you might think she was eighty to hear her talk. Her father and mother think her perfect, and let her do just what she likes. It was a good lesson for ma," said Charlotte, giggling. "But Zoe and me made friends, and she promised to write to me."

"Is she pretty?" asked Rosaleen.

"Why, she's lovely," said Charlotte, indignantly. "Of course it's *partly* her clothes. But she's got grey eyes and black eyelashes, and the sweetest little face like a doll. There's too little of her, and ma says she's just like a thread-paper. You know ma's way. She says she'll very likely get married before she goes back to America in the autumn, only she hasn't seen a single Englishman she likes half so well as her cousin Iron yet. She's so funny and frank, and she says *what she likes* before her father and mother, and they only laugh. Ma's face was a study."

"I don't think you speak very respectfully of Mrs. Trethewy," said Rosaleen, reprovingly. "After all, she *is* your mother."

"I declare, Rosaleen, you're just the same," cried Charlotte, good-naturedly. "For ever bothering about what one *ought* to do. Don't you remember ma used always to say you were a prig?"

CHAPTER X

KITTY, in her blue cotton frock and shady poppied hat, carried bowls of primroses from the porch, where she arranged them, to the red-tiled vestibule, and thence up the worm-eaten oak stair to the little green parlour which she and Rosaleen used as a sitting-room.

This apartment was still occasionally referred to in moments of forgetfulness as the nursery; though officially they had conferred on it the title of boudoir.

It was a shabby old-fashioned room, but the undisputed possession of it had hitherto given them pleasure. That the carpet was threadbare and the furniture rickety mattered nothing. They kept their treasures here, reverently cherishing the relics of early childhood, as girls will. Rosaleen's few books occupied a corner shelf put up by the boy Johnny, who had a taste for carpentering; and Kitty, who liked comfort, had a rocking-chair and a work-table next the red-cushioned window-seat, which was her sister's special resort.

Their bedroom opened into this parlour—a long, low attic with a sloping roof. White dimity curtains hung from rings in the ceiling, French fashion, round the narrow white beds on either side of the fireplace, and the same spotless drapery shrouded the window.

The dressing-table bore only brushes and combs and a glass of flowers beside the looking-glass. Their toilets had hitherto cost them small thought and little trouble.

But the plainness and bareness of both rooms became sadly apparent to Kitty after her inspection of Charlotte's sleeping apartment and well-filled wardrobe. She looked sorrowfully at the two Sunday frocks hung on pegs. Discontent entered into her heart and took up its abode there.

As she swept up the *débris* of stalks and leaves in the porch, and carried the last bowl full of spring flowers into her grandfather's study, the tears fell continually from her blue eyes and sprinkled the pure little upturned faces of the primroses.

Kitty's expression was usually so bright, and her spirits were so radiant, that the change in her could not be unperceived by her sister and Pélagie. Her grandfather, however, was the last to observe her depression; and when he came upon her eventually, sitting sobbing in his favourite corner of the garden, among the wallflowers and forget-me-nots, he was so dismayed that he had much ado not to shed tears himself.

"What is the matter, mignonne? Who has been vexing thee?" he cried with tender ferocity.

"It is nothing, *bon papa*," sobbed Kitty. "I have finished arranging the primroses. I only came here to rest, and then I began thinking——"

She raised a pair of drowned blue eyes to the face of her susceptible grandparent.

"Thou art not wont to trouble thy little head with thought. Confide in me, my little one," said old Patrick; and he sat down, much alarmed, in his wicker chair, which she had brought out for him, with her own folding stool and basket of work.

"It is nothing. I meant to trim my bonnet. But what is the good? It is ugly and out of fashion, and I have none of the proper things."

"Is that all, my pigeon?" His alarm began to subside. "But to cry for such a bagatelle! Johnny will catch the pony, and thou wilt go to Domaford, and all will be right. Thou shalt have a new bonnet if thou wilt."

"What is the use of a Domaford bonnet?" said Kitty, and sobbed afresh.

The Vicomte rubbed his nose, dismayed and bewildered.

Kitty had taken off her poppied hat and thrown it on the grass.

Even her tears could not altogether mar her prettiness, as she leant her face on her hands and her elbows on her knees.

The plain blue cotton gown displayed the pretty curves of her slender figure and the fairness of her neck, from which her golden brown hair was combed and twisted in a loose coronal above her brow.

Her little head and ears were exquisitely shaped, and her face a perfect short oval.

Kitty's loveliness was of the kind that no one ever disputes, of the kind that goes straight to the heart of man, woman, and child. The cherub face; of heavenly blue eyes, straight short nose, and red bow-shaped mouth, ready curved for laughter or pouts, but loveliest in its rare repose.

"Oh, *bon papa*," she sobbed, "it's not the bonnet I'm crying for, and I can make myself a prettier bonnet than anything they've got in the horrid old Domaford shops. And I don't suppose you'll understand my feelings, *bon papa*, for you are only a man, and I'm sure I don't *want* to be like Charlotte, if it comes to that. But all the same, I can't help seeing a great deal of reason in all she says. And—and—oh, *bon papa*, nobody will ever say it if I don't," said Kitty, with a fresh burst of tears, "but what is the use of your having a little mine in Spain, like you

sometimes talk about, if Rosaleen and me are *never* to have any advantages?"

The Vicomte almost fell out of his wicker chair, so great was his astonishment and his dismay.

Never to have any advantages. His little ones, for whom he had lived, and of whose complete happiness and well-being he had so triumphantly assured himself.

"It is as though the good God had decided to recompense me for all my unmerited sorrows and disappointments, by permitting these children, a thousand times dearer to me than myself, to occupy an earthly paradise," he had sometimes reflected.

The Vicomte did not pretend to think that he had deserved his misfortunes. He was too simple and too honest to assume a diffidence foreign to his disposition.

"I was a brave soldier and did my duty, and have never wilfully wronged a fellow-creature," he thought. "*Le bon Dieu*, knowing well what soldiers are, would hardly expect them to be blameless as priests or women. I did my possible, and yet misfortune pursued me. I lost my wife, and the child I adored. Still, in the evening of life He permits me to enjoy the sunshine, and to give the perfection of happiness to the children of my child."

But it seemed the children of his child took a different view.

His face of startled inquiry encouraged Kitty to proceed.

"It may seem nothing to you, grandpapa. But when you think we have never even been to London! Even Rosaleen, who cares for nothing so long as she can bury herself in a book, can't help owning she longs to see Westminster Abbey and the picture galleries, and to go to a real theatre. Oh, *bon papa*, look at us! We know not a word of German or Italian; we have had no dancing or gymnastic lessons;

our frocks are all wrong; and we have never stayed at an hotel in our lives."

This crowning reproach produced a fresh paroxysm of anguish.

The Vicomte experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling, but he conquered his inclination to laugh; and indeed the desire was presently quenched in his growing dismay.

For old Patrick realized that these crude sentences sounded the death-knell of his little ones' long childhood, and his own exceeding joy therein.

He looked wistfully at the pretty weeping face and the slender but rounded figure, and realized for the first time that Kitty was a woman grown, even though her plaintive words had been spoken as a child speaks.

Perhaps he had been selfish, reflected the Vicomte, sadly. He had thought only of keeping his treasures to himself, of the healthfulness and purity of the little life they led beneath the thatched roof of Honeycott. Not thus had he treated his daughter Rosalie. Nothing had been lacking to her youth that the world might consider essential to its embellishment, or that could add to her pleasure therein.

She had been familiar with Paris gaiety from her earliest girlhood. She had enjoyed the opera, the theatre, and the society of young men and maidens of her own age, as well as that of her father's contemporaries, who adored her.

Memories of her gay little *salon* returned to the Vicomte; of her pretty accomplishments; her dancing, her singing, and her guitar; of her excellent taste in dress; of that mixture of extravagance and thrift peculiar to little *mondaines* of her class.

Certainly Rosalie, whilst maintaining always an adorable simplicity, had tasted many innocent pleasures of life and youth which had been altogether denied to her children.

Certainly, also, she had had many facilities for improving her natural gifts and talents which they had never known.

But to what end, sighed the Vicomte, since the accomplishments which had cost her so many hours of industry were doomed to be hidden in an early grave? The Vicomte had been inordinately proud of her charming acquirements, as of her grace and her beauty; and he had learnt that these, too, were vanity.

He cared no longer that his children should shine in the world; he cared only that their souls and bodies should be pure and healthful. But they had yet to buy their own experience in the matter; and the conclusions to which their grandfather had come at the end of his life were not very likely to impress them whilst they were still at the beginning of their own.

"It is true what you say, my pigeon," he said in subdued tones. "It is of no use, the money I have put by, if it is to bring you no advantages, as you say. Be happy; you shall go—we will all go—to London, to an hotel—where you will: and you shall buy what you will and have all the dancing lessons you require. Yes—we will certainly take this expedition, even if it is to last but a *quinzaine de jours*."

Kitty resembled her grandfather only in this, that in sorrow or perplexity, trouble or anger, the laugh in her blue eyes was never so far distant but that it could be easily recalled.

"Oh, *bon papa*, how good you are!" she cried fervently, with blushing cheek and sparkling eye. "Do you really mean it? But it would be delightful."

"To London," repeated the old gentleman, firmly. "*C'est entendu.* Though I know London not at all, and have not moved from this roof for more years than I care to remember."

"But you knew Paris, grandpapa. It is the same thing."

"Did I know Paris?" He laughed, but the tears stood in his eyes. "When my youth returns to me—when the blood I shed for France is restored to my veins—I shall see again the Paris I used to know. I have not seen Paris since thy mother left it, a bride, twenty years ago. I will not return thither without her. We will go where there are neither ghosts nor recollections for me, and only pleasure for thee. And thou shalt return, *ma poulette*, to mock thyself of these so elegant and distinguished travellers who have disturbed thy peace of mind."

Not many days after this conversation the Vicomte found himself seated in a first-class railway carriage, with his plaid shawl spread over his knees, and his granddaughters' faces opposite him, beaming with delight and excitement.

He had not dared to allow himself time for reflection after his rash promise, though his disinclination for the trip increased almost hourly, as the actual preparations for it advanced.

To leave his garden at the very moment when its yearly recompense for his toil had begun; to leave his peaches and plums in bloom, after the late frosts, which had caused him agonies of apprehension; to leave the narcissus and jonquil in flower, and the tulips just bursting into a mass of variegated colour, seemed little short of madness, on reflection, to old Patrick.

He could have wept—indeed he did weep—as he wandered disconsolately round his tiny kingdom on the eve of departure.

In vain did the faithful Johnny vow and declare that not one of his master's directions should be neglected; that the cats and the birds should be regularly fed, and the

plants in the small greenhouse regularly watered. In vain did Mrs. Broome promise to descend daily from her retirement at Cuckoo Cottage, to look after the house, and keep an eye on Johnny. In vain did Rosaleen and Kitty wrap his books in newspapers, and hide camphor in his cupboards, to defeat the unborn moth, or spread coverings over the shabby furniture and the shabbier carpets.

The Vicomte foresaw the ruin of his cherished house, and the neglect of his beloved garden.

He indulged the gloomiest forebodings regarding the dangers of the journey and the unwholesomeness of the London air; and reduced his granddaughters to tears by showing them solemnly the drawer of his writing-table in which they were to look for his last will and testament, and where lurked the packets of letters that were to be burnt unread, and where the papers that must be preserved indefinitely as family records of importance.

Rosaleen, in a burst of remorse, offered to abandon the expedition altogether, and even Kitty wavered for a moment.

"Of course if it's going to *kill* grandpapa," she said tearfully; "but I don't believe it will for a moment. And how can we change everything now? The fly is coming from Domaford to-morrow morning, and our things are packed up. Everybody would laugh at us. If *bon papa* hates going so much, surely you and I could manage to go alone," said Kitty, struck with a brilliant idea.

Rosaleen was petrified by her independence.

"I don't say we couldn't take Pélagie, or better still, Mrs. Broome, to make it proper," said Kitty, with immense dignity. "Of course we should have to do something of that kind. I know perfectly well it is not considered proper for young ladies to travel quite alone. But I am not at all afraid of going by ourselves. Suppose we put it

into grandpapa's head that we could manage very well without him?"

"You have the courage of ignorance," said Rosaleen, shaking her head.

"Why, what *could* happen to us?" asked Kitty; and as Rosaleen had not the slightest idea, she was forced to take refuge in silence. "It is a civilized country, after all. We could take our tickets, and go to the hotel Charlotte told us about, and call on the Copps—I mean the Domafords—and just surprise the old things. It would be fun to see Lady Domaford's face. I am rather glad they aren't here to know we're going."

But Kitty did not really venture to propose to her grandfather that they should leave him behind; and the thought of parting with his little ones never once occurred to the old gentleman.

He had promised to take them to London, and he knew he must abide by his promise. Perhaps his conscience pricked him secretly when he contemplated the ever-increasing profits of his Spanish investments. What was he to do with all this money?

The Vicomte regarded the sum total of his wealth with something like alarm. He began to fear that the possession of it might some day deprive him of the right to lead the frugal and retired life he loved, even as it now deprived him of all just excuse for denying his grandchildren the outing they desired.

Supposing he revealed the existence of his wealth to these young and restless and pleasure-loving creatures, what would be the result? Might they not demand a wider life—travel, luxuries, horses, carriages, even servants? Old Patrick's heart sank. Would he be justified in denying them? Was he even justified, he thought, in allowing them to continue to suppose, as they did at present, that

his means were straitened, and the little mine in Spain a mere joke?

The Vicomte thought of his lucky investment with dismay. Who could have supposed those few thousands would increase and multiply in this astounding manner?

At first he had been more amused than impressed by the accounts he received of the fabulous interest the Alcumund mine was to pay its owners, in proportion to their shares in the venture.

"It is very fine, this wonderful Spanish treasure-mine, but it is too sudden. It will disappear," predicted the Vicomte, shrugging his shoulders.

But he was gradually forced to believe that it was solid.

Even when he was convinced of this, however, he did not in any way increase his modest expenditure; nor dream of ordering his Paris bankers to add to the small sum they remitted quarterly to the Domaford bank for his local and daily expenses. But he was obliged to give some attention to the investment of his profits, which increased out of all proportion to the original capital. He disliked writing letters, but he found it necessary to write not a few. One he sent to John Brett, inviting him to take his share of the Alcumund off his hands at the price he had originally paid. He explained that he had been repaid for his first outlay so many times over that his conscience was oppressed.

John Brett chuckled very much over this letter, and the answer he eventually sent silenced, if it bewildered the Vicomte.

It alluded to the Alcumund copper mine as a small venture of light importance, the writer's interest in which had long since been made over to his son Iron and his brother Silas. More important matters now occupied the attention of John P. Brett. If the Vicomte wished to sell

his share, however, why not? John Brett mentioned what it would be worth now in the market, and the Vicomte lost his breath. His admiration for his old friend's genius was very great.

Enclosed within the letter was a cutting from a New York journal, which gave a list of reputed millionaires who had made their fortunes within the last ten years, together with a rough estimate of their supposed incomes.

On the list the name of John Brett figured conspicuously.

The Vicomte wrote no more of his project for transferring his share of the Alcumund mine to his friend. His fabulous fortune, when contrasted with those estimated millions, seemed a mere bagatelle.

Still, as time went on and his list of securities grew longer, the responsibility weighed heavily upon him. He was getting old: too old, he thought, to change the conditions of his existence; too old, after twenty years' seclusion, to face again the world of men; and yet—if the halcyon days of his little ones' childhood were indeed over—if they insisted—if their happiness depended upon it, ought he not to make the sacrifice? Thus the Vicomte's reflections during the journey were not altogether cheerful ones, and at the end of it he anticipated many disagreeables; bad cooking, bad air, and noisy crowds doubtless attended him in the Metropolis, he predicted, with a melancholy not in accordance with his usual placid and cheerful philosophy. But even philosophers may repine, when dragged from their retreats to face the evils of the unknown.

The Vicomte was so hale and hearty, in spite of his eighty-two years, that he was quite as well able to support fatigue as his granddaughters, and far better able than Pélagie, who nevertheless had no complaint to make on the subject.

It had not occurred to Pélagie, either, that she could be

left behind, though she was far less active than her old master, and very nearly as ponderous.

She was very contented, as she remarked, to make a little voyage, and to see London. Her polished countenance shone with undeniable pleasure during the journey. She had thought of everything; and at intervals enumerated aloud to herself the whole contents of the Vicomte's portmanteau, and of his granddaughters' modest trunk.

Her own baggage consisted of a single *paquet*, carried conveniently under her arm, so that her plump hands were free for a large basket filled with food for the travellers.

At the bottom of the basket lurked some soap and candles, matches and towels. Pélagie suspected that many of the necessaries of life would be lacking at an hotel, and thus prepared for emergencies.

Her money was sewn into her stays, and her gold brooch stitched as well as pinned on to her gown. She had not listened in vain to the warnings of Devon rustics, who had heard strange stories of London town.

Charlotte had loudly lamented their departure, and for a moment almost inclined towards accompanying them, in order to give them the benefit of her valuable experience. But her desire to rearrange and redecorate her house before the arrival of her visitors prevailed; and her counsels were scornfully rejected by Rosaleen and Kitty.

"Advise grandpapa, indeed! Who has travelled all over the world."

"But he is such an old man now, and he's not been outside this poky little place for a lifetime; he'll find everything different," said Charlotte, giggling.

"We think it would be good for grandpapa, as well as for us, to have a little change," said Rosaleen; but she repented her excessive dignity, and offered to do any commissions Charlotte chose.

Charlotte, who never bore malice, willingly accepted this offer.

"I want a tennis and croquet set," she said, "to amuse my visitors when they do come. You can get them cheap at the Stores. I suppose Conrade and Odo will be at Monksbere sooner or later, and surely they will come over and play, and perhaps bring their friends too. Games are not very amusing when there are no gentlemen about."

"Odo will be home from Oxford in the summer, of course; but we haven't seen Conrade for ages. He is in India with his regiment," said Kitty, with a sigh. "He used to be much nicer than Odo."

"*I* never found him so," said Charlotte. "But he used to pet you, I remember; of course you were so much younger. Never shall I forget the scrape he got me into with ma, by locking me into the store-cupboard. I was so frightened I hardly ate anything—though I was there for hours."

"But he caught you stealing raisins. He only meant to give you a fright, and let you out; if he hadn't unluckily forgotten all about you."

"It was a cruel trick, no matter what he caught me doing," said Charlotte, feelingly. "Still, I hope he has outgrown that sort of thing, and he would be much better than nobody. I must find some young men, if only to amuse Zoe."

"Odo is coming of age this year, so there will certainly be plenty of festivities, and perhaps Conrade may come home on leave for them," suggested Rosaleen. "And besides, there will be Mr. Brett."

"We can't divide him among four of us, even if he is as nice as Zoe says," said Charlotte, mournfully. "And how can we play games without partners? It would be very dull."

"We can play among ourselves, I suppose?" said Kitty, demurely, but in her heart she agreed with Charlotte that it would be very dull.

"It would be scarcely worth while going to the expense of getting croquet and tennis things down from London for *that*," said Charlotte, reproachfully; "and Mr. Brett is not even a *young* man. When all is said and done, he is well over thirty years old."

CHAPTER XI

THE little party attracted more attention than is usually bestowed upon travellers, when they arrived at the respectable, old-fashioned hotel recommended by the experienced Charlotte.

The immense size of the Vicomte, the odd pattern of his clothes, his plaid shawl, his yellow waistcoat, and the entire lack of self-consciousness which caused him to beam approvingly upon his surroundings, provoked not a few furtive smiles among the loungers in the entrance.

Pélagie's large rubicund face was also illuminated with satisfaction. She stood with her market basket resting upon her hip, whilst she chuckled and nodded responsively to the glances bestowed upon her.

Rosaleen and Kitty's attention was so anxiously fixed upon their grandfather, however, that they did not notice Pélagie's share, nor their own, in the interest excited.

Rosaleen gave their names and address, in a low tone, to the supercilious young woman who presided over the books at the office; and her cheeks burned with impatience when the Vicomte insisted upon putting down his wraps, finding his glasses, and making a great delay and commotion before he carefully and slowly inscribed his name in a flourishing French hand, bestowing a friendly smile and nod upon the astonished damsel as he returned to her care the book thus newly ornamented.

Rosaleen's warm heart smote her almost instantly, however, for her own impatience, and she pressed closer to her grandfather's side, and shot defiance, as it were, from her dark eyes upon the harmless onlookers.

But as they mounted the staircase to the apartments on the first floor which the Vicomte had ordered, Kitty inquired in a petulant whisper of Pélagie—

"Y-a-t-il quelquechose de drôle en grandpapa, qu'on fait tellement attention à lui ?"

"Mais non, mademoiselle, au contraire. C'est qu'il a l'air noble, Monsieur le Vicomte ! Voyons comme tout le monde nous regarde !" said Pélagie, delighted.

The sisters shared a double-bedded apartment, divided from their grandfather's sleeping quarters by a small sitting-room. Here they met him before descending to the *table d'hôte* dinner which both had so eagerly anticipated.

Strangely enough, Rosaleen and Kitty now found themselves depressed, whilst their grandfather's perpetual good spirits had regained the ascendency over his unusual sadness. They had not expected to find London so gloomy, nor the outlook from their window so cheerless. They had imagined an elegant suite of apartments, tastefully furnished; and to find three small rooms of dingy appearance and upholstery, ornamented only by tariff-cards on the mantelpiece and antimacassars on the chair-backs, disappointed them greatly.

They were also beset by secret but dreadful doubts of their beloved grandparent's ability to suit himself to his new surroundings. The anxiety of young people that their elders shall do them credit in public is of a far more poignant kind than the mild hopes of the average parent concerning the conduct of his offspring. It is deepened by the agony of self-consciousness peculiar to youth, and by

the bitter knowledge that, whatever happens, their disapproval must not be too clearly betrayed.

Rosaleen and Kitty examined their grandfather's appearance with more attention than they had troubled to bestow upon each other. Each instinctively knew that the other would do her best to present a creditable appearance to the world, so far as her limited possibilities would allow.

But for *bon papa*, who could tell?

Would it please him to descend to *table d'hôte* in dressing-gown and slippers, or would he insist upon wearing his plaid shawl—a garment they had hitherto accepted in good faith, but which had revealed itself as remarkable to their clear-sighted young eyes during the journey, when it ill bore comparison with the attire of other old gentlemen also *en route* for the Metropolis?

They sighed with relief when he made his appearance at last, in the dress-coat which he had not worn since his last dinner with his son-in-law, and into which he had struggled with great difficulty, in spite of Pélagie's very obvious alterations—for his girth had increased since those days. He wore a red ribbon in his buttonhole, and the ends of his ferocious moustache were waxed.

Rosaleen and Kitty exchanged glances of infinite satisfaction. They agreed with Pélagie that the old gentleman had *l'air noble*, and they accompanied him downstairs with all their pride in him renewed.

The Vicomte's good spirits by no means flagged when he found himself seated opposite his pretty granddaughters at a small table in the dining-room, with a plate of soup before him, a napkin tucked under his chin, and a pint bottle of champagne in a pail of ice at his right hand.

Released as though by magic from the bondage of his gloomy anticipations, he found himself wondering cheerfully at his own want of enterprise in not having sooner

abandoned his seclusion for the sake of his little ones. His Irish heart warmed at the mere sound of the clinking glasses around him, and the propinquity of his fellow-creatures.

A noisy party of young people, pretty girls, and attendant youths, with a sprinkling of older folk, were dining at an adjacent table.

The Vicomte watched them with delight, and Rosaleen and Kitty could hardly eat their dinner for listening to the disjointed scraps of conversation that came their way, or for admiring the ladies' diaphanous gowns and sparkling ornaments.

Kitty's admiration, however, was tempered by mortification on her own account.

What must these exquisitely dressed maidens be thinking of her and Rosaleen? The tears filled her blue eyes as she looked at Rosaleen's plain muslin frock, which both had thought so suitable and becoming scarce ten minutes earlier, but which now revealed itself as badly cut and altogether out of the fashion.

Rosaleen understood perfectly her sister's look, and squeezed her hand under the table.

"What does it matter?" she whispered. "They are far too much taken up with themselves to notice us."

"Did you hear what they said? They are going to the theatre," murmured Kitty. "Perhaps that is why they are dressed up so. But no; every one is the same, more or less."

"Indeed they are not. Look at the old lady in the alpaca, with the grimy little cap. I believe Charlotte was perfectly right. She said it didn't matter how one dressed in an hotel."

"It matters to me," said Kitty, swallowing a sob with her morsel of chicken.

"It is not so much that the cooking is bad, though that, too, leaves much to be desired," said the Vicomte, scanning the ingredients of an *entrée* with the disgust of an expert—"it is not so much the cooking as the materials. Là, là, là! What kind of a lean fowl was this in its wretched lifetime? And the truffles are stale; and the terrible bottled ornaments! But I would as soon eat specimens preserved in spirits at a museum as these cocks-combs. And this tinned gravy thickened with musty flour. There is no nourishment here; nothing that is good. Remove it, *mon ami*," said the Vicomte, benevolently, to the waiter. "It is not your fault that you are a German, and have no gift for the service of the table. No, none at all, since you let your thumb dip into the soup as you hurry about with plates already cold, and since you are not ready to observe that I have finished my little roll, hard as a stone and sour as vinegar."

He thus relieved his feelings by apostrophizing the young and careless attendant in voluble French.

"They are in a hurry, those charming ones," he said regretfully, as the party at the next table rose.

"They are going to the theatre, grandpapa," said Kitty.

"Well, and why not? We also," said the Vicomte, gaily—"we also will go to the theatre, if you choose. We are here to amuse ourselves, *ma mignonne*."

"Oh, *bon papa*, won't it tire you, after the journey?" faltered Rosaleen; but her eyes, as well as Kitty's, sparkled with hope.

"*Quelle idée!*" said the Vicomte, bursting into a laugh. "Waiter, order at once a cab, to attend at the door after the dinner. These young ladies wish to go to the theatre."

His stentorian tones were by no means inaudible, even at the further end of the long room. Rosaleen instinctively

spoke lower than usual, in the faint hope of inducing her grandfather to lower his voice.

"But, grandpapa, Kitty and I have no evening dress. Ought we not to be in evening dress?"

"But no, my child. One does not dress at the theatre. Stay, perhaps the fashions have changed. In London, who can tell? These young ladies were certainly very elegant. Listen! you shall wear a shawl or a little cloak, and thus no one will perceive the details of your toilette. What does it matter?"

Even Kitty's vanity was not strong enough to make her desire to postpone so unexpected a pleasure, and the sisters sat through the rest of the dinner in a tremor of joyful anticipation.

But old Patrick was economical in small matters, however recklessly generous in large ones. He considered that since he had to pay handsomely for the very moderate meal set before him, it would be a sinful waste not to taste every dish on the lengthy ménu, in the hope of finding something to tempt his palate.

He dawdled cheerfully through the courses, commenting with interest upon every detail, conversing affably with the waiter, and examining his fellow-diners in the most benevolent spirit.

His perseverance was eventually rewarded by a discovery of the excellence of the Stilton cheese; and he drove Kitty nearly frantic by addressing her as his little one, before the waiter, and helping her to a crumb of his own portion instead of permitting the dish to be handed to her with proper formality.

"Why—*why* must grandpapa tell the waiter that I only drink water, as though I were a *child?*" she whispered in anguished tones to Rosaleen. "If he would only *ask* what wine I prefer. I shouldn't accept it. Oh, if he would but

treat me like an ordinary grown-up person! I could say, thank you, I *prefer* water. What must the waiter think?"

They settled the Vicomte at last in the hall, with his coffee and cigarette, whilst they flew to seek their wraps and to acquaint Pélagie with the joyful intelligence of the projected outing.

The agony of youthful impatience which possessed them was by no means assuaged by the lengthiness of old Patrick's directions to the cabman, by the deliberation with which he settled himself in the vehicle, or by the slowness of the aged quadruped which eventually drew them to the door of the theatre.

The Vicomte was too ponderous to leave or enter any conveyance without considerable delay, and Rosaleen felt almost inclined to cry, when, after surmounting the initial difficulty of conducting her grandfather in safety to the box-office, and having listened joyfully to his lofty requests for the best seats in the house, they were told they were too late—there were no good seats to be had.

"*Tiens—tiens!*" said the Vicomte, in no way put out. "There are, however, other theatres in London."

To one of these other theatres they proceeded; but here a placard confronted them with the information that the house was full.

"It is exactly like a nightmare," said poor Kitty, half laughing and half crying. "I believe we shall drive about London all night looking at the outside of the theatres."

"Even that is far more exciting than sitting in the hotel," said Rosaleen; and Kitty was obliged to console herself with this reflection.

"Let me get out here, without you, *bon papa*," said Rosaleen, at the third attempt. "I know exactly what to do now."

"A young girl should not be seen in a crowd without a protector," said the Vicomte.

"Oh, *bon papa*—at my age! and there is no crowd whatever inside," said Rosaleen; and she descended in haste.

Returning dejectedly, she told the expectant occupants of the cab that the second act of the play was nearly over, and that the man could not promise them good seats.

The driver was quite concerned at this third disappointment, as he opened the door for her to re-enter the cab.

"Lor bless you, miss, what kin yer expec'?" he said. "It's close on arf parse nine. There's a time to think of going to a pop'lar play as begins at hate o'clock! You wouldn't get yur money's worth, nor near it. Why don't yer go to the 'alls? You'll be just right for the best turns."

"The 'alls," said old Patrick, doubtfully.

"The Lambra, Hempire, or Pallus," explained the cabman.

"What do you see there, please?" said Rosaleen.

"What *don't* you see there, miss? Triloquists, acrerbats, conjuring tricks, and a fine lot of moosic. I'm partial to moosic myself."

"Oh, grandpapa!" cried Rosaleen and Kitty, in a breath.

"You hain't no need to be afraid, sir. All the nobs goes there after dinner at arf parse nine," said the cabman, good-naturedly addressing himself towards allaying the doubts of the old gentleman.

"Drive us there at once, my friend," said the Vicomte. "If it is not amusing, my faith, we can very easily come away."

"Lor bless yer! not amusing!" said the cabman, ironically; and he climbed chuckling on to his box.

"What a very kind man!" said Kitty, enchanted.

"But he has certainly a good heart," said the Vicomte.

"I have always wanted to hear a ventriloquist," said Rosaleen.

"We will see all that is to be seen, and afterwards a *bon petit souper, hein?*" said the Vicomte, hilariously. "There must be restaurants in London where the cooking is not so bad. Since we are in town, we may certainly enjoy ourselves. The little mine in Spain permits it."

He could not help laughing heartily at the remembrance of the little mine in Spain.

"The change has certainly done *bon papa* good already," his astonished grandchildren whispered to each other.

Such was the Vicomte's merry humour that he determined to overpay the cabman, and tendered half a crown to the driver with a beaming smile, which gave place to vehement wrath when the man, unimpressed, returned the coin, and demanded three and sixpence as his legal fare.

The excitement of this episode, and the calming of their grandfather's indignation, so occupied Rosaleen and Kitty's attention, and covered them with confusion, that they found themselves at last in their velvet fauteuils without any clear remembrance how they got there.

"*Dieu merci,*" said old Patrick, joyfully, "*on peut fumer!*" and he lighted a gigantic cigar, which presently soothed him to complete enjoyment of the performance and of his granddaughters' pleasure therein.

"Everybody is dressed anyhow," said Kitty, with a hasty glance around her, and she leant back with a sigh of relief. "But I wish all the gentlemen would not smoke; the air is so nasty."

"What *does* that matter? Oh, Kitty, *look!*" said Rosaleen, though her sister needed no such injunction.

An acrobatic performance was given.

The Vicomte, leaning back comfortably in his stall, applauded frantically, and with characteristic enthusiasm.

Rosaleen and Kitty, absorbed by the entertainment, shared his delight.

"It is wonderful, wonderful! But the girl who swings the best of all; the one in blue satin, with that *magnificent* golden hair; did you ever see such quantities? Isn't she beautiful? Isn't she an angel?" cried Kitty, like a child, with scarlet cheeks and wide, astonished eyes.

A comic song followed the acrobats, and Rosaleen's taste was vaguely offended.

She looked at Kitty, and found that her sister's attention had wandered from the stage to the decorations of the building. Though Rosaleen scarcely understood the song, she felt somehow glad that Kitty was not listening. The cockney jargon of the singer conveyed no meaning to the Vicomte, and he was better pleased by the next item on the performance—a floral ballet prettily danced to exceedingly spirited and graceful music.

Kitty's eyes sparkled; the colour and variety of the dresses delighted her. She watched the graceful movements of the dancers with rapturous attention; she hardly realized they were living persons. The scene was only a constantly changing picture.

Rosaleen's fancy, too, was enchained by the glitter of the stage, no less than by the sweet and often plaintive strains of the orchestra.

It was as though she had been suddenly transported to the fairy world of her waking dreams.

The music brightened her imagination and quickened her pulses. At first she gazed as though upon a blissful and enchanted vision; then, suddenly, came a revulsion of feeling.

She thought of the blue hills of Devon, of the pure breath of her native valley, the light dancing on the yellow

oak leaves uncrumpling to the sun, of the wild cherry blowing in the brown woods, the pear tree scattering snow upon the good red earth, the long evening shadows falling across the silent ways.

These familiar things appeared strange as a distant heaven in the glare of the artificial light, the reek of tobacco, the hot poisonous air.

Innocent as she was, things read, and half forgotten because so little comprehended, now returned to her memory. She shrank vaguely from the painted faces and extravagant finery which surrounded her. The audience began to attract her attention rather than the stage, though one interesting performance now succeeded another.

There is an order of human being which does not look its best after dining plentifully, and when over-conscious of worldly prosperity. A specimen of this class sat within measurable distance of Rosaleen, and observing her youth, her brilliant complexion, and her evident unsophisticatedness, stared her out of countenance.

The poor child fixed her eyes once more on the stage, feeling miserably uncomfortable, and all her beautiful thoughts and fancies fled.

"Rosaleen," whispered Kitty, in agonized tones, "grandpapa has dropped off to sleep. He will give such a loud snore when he wakes up again. What shall we do?"

Old Patrick, soothed by the music and his cigar, had fallen into a gentle slumber. His head inclined towards the creases in his embroidered waistcoat.

"We had better wake him now, while the orchestra is playing rather aloud, and then nobody will hear," said Rosaleen. "And oh, Kitty, my head aches, and I've seen enough of the entertainment. Would you very much mind if we went home—I mean back to the hotel—before the end?" said Rosaleen, piteously.

"Why, we've hardly been here an hour; but yes, I'll do as you like. I see lots of people are going away now, and I'm sure it's not the thing to stop till the end," said Kitty, willing to be fashionable, though anxious to stay.

Long practice enabled them to wake the Vicomte with great dexterity and caution, and though it took some time to make him realize where he was, and why he was leaving, yet these feats being accomplished without undue commotion, the little party found itself in a small crowd on the outer steps of the music-hall.

Here, whilst the Vicomte sought in vain for a cab, an astonished voice sounded—

"Rosaleen! Kitty!"

"Odo!" they cried joyfully.

"What on earth are you doing here?" said the young gentleman.

"Why, grandpapa brought us. We have come to London for a fortnight. Why shouldn't we be here? Isn't it a—a right place for us to come to?" faltered Rosaleen, putting the vague doubts that had haunted her throughout the evening into words.

"It's not at all the sort of place for girls like you," said Odo, with the gloomy severity of extreme youth.

"But how could we know that?" said Rosaleen. "And I'm sure grandpapa didn't."

"I believe it's all nonsense. There were plenty of girls there besides *us*," cried Miss Kitty. "And if it is not a nice place, why are you here yourself, Odo?"

"I didn't say it wasn't a nice place. I said it wasn't a place for little girls," said Odo, in a snubbing tone. "Of course it's all right for men."

"I thought you were at Oxford," retorted Kitty.

Odo did not deign to bandy more words with Kitty, who was apt to get the better of such encounters.

"Where are you staying, Rosaleen?" he asked. "I shall be in town a day or two, and I'll come and see you."

"We are at the same hotel as Charlotte was."

"Charlotte! Has she turned up again?" said Odo, with a laugh.

"She has come to live at the Court," thrust in Kitty, "and she is going to give dances and garden-parties, and all sorts of things, and she wants you to come to them."

"I should jolly well think I would come," said Odo; "I'd give anything to see old Charlotte again. Do you remember what tricks we used to play on her? Hallo, your grandfather seems to be in difficulties. I'd better help him find that cab."

He greeted his old friend warmly, sent a commissionaire for a cab, and as soon as it came, put the whole party into it as speedily as might be. But though he was in a hurry he found time for a parting word.

"My mother's got a tea-fight on to-morrow," he said. "Mind you and Kitty turn up, 99, Grosvenor Square."

"But she hasn't invited us," cried Rosaleen.

"She doesn't know we're in London," added Kitty.

"Then, of course, she couldn't invite you; she would if she'd known. But I'll tell her you're coming. It won't be nearly so stupid if you're there," said Odo, reassuringly; "and you'll see Conrade, for he's home on leave. I'll look out for you about five."

"You're sure you'll be there," they said anxiously, in a breath.

"I've *got* to be there, worse luck," said the candid young gentleman.

CHAPTER XII

THE brightness of the May morning caused Rosaleen and Kitty to forget all the disappointments and disillusions of the previous evening, and to meet their grandfather with eager, smiling faces.

After all, in spite of the London atmosphere, the lilac was blowing, and the laburnum dropping golden rain over the grimy railings of the small and sooty spaces before the opposite houses. Spring was spring, even in London; and the sunshine was struggling through the smoke.

"Shopping in the morning, and a party this afternoon," said Kitty to Rosaleen. Her feet danced on the staircase, and her blue eyes sparkled. "How delightful London is! I only wish——"

"Well, what do you wish?"

"It sounds a little ungrateful, but if only grandpapa would let us go shopping by ourselves, or even with Pélagie."

"I am afraid it would disappoint him," said Rosaleen, mournfully.

"Whatever we do, we must *not* do that," agreed Kitty, anxiously; "but oh, Rosaleen——"

They looked expressively at one another. There was no need for words.

"Poor *bon papa!* but if it amuses him," said Rosaleen, tenderly.

"And one of us can talk to him, while the other does the serious business, and chooses the things," said Kitty.

"Oh, Rosaleen, do let it be me! I care so much more about clothes than you do. You will be getting some artistic things quite out of the fashion."

"The same things can't suit us both; me so dark and you so fair," said Rosaleen, reproachfully.

"We will each choose our own, then. But I *know* they can't make us dresses in time for to-day. A ready-made skirt is my only hope," groaned Kitty. "I almost wish I hadn't been too proud to ask Charlotte the name of her dressmaker. Anyway, I know Regent Street and Bond Street are good places for shopping in. I *carefully* noted that. I wonder how much grandpapa means us to spend?"

"I am afraid this trip to London will cost him a great deal," said Rosaleen, anxiously. "Perhaps we ought not to buy very much."

"It is only for once in a way," said Kitty, wistfully. "He said he wanted us to enjoy ourselves thoroughly, and how could we do that if we weren't properly dressed?"

"It would be impossible," said Rosaleen, shaking her head. "I only wish he would tell us *what* we may spend exactly, or I shall feel guilty all the time we're shopping, and extravagant. Perhaps we are taking advantage of his good nature, and he forgets how careful he ought to be in the pleasure of seeing us happy. Poor *bon papa*, we ought to consider for him. He is old and thoughtless," sighed Rosaleen.

"Let us boldly ask him what we may spend," said Kitty. "But no. I daren't risk it. He has so little idea of what clothes cost that he might say ten shillings apiece, and there would be an end of everything. One does not know what to be at."

But breakfast inspired her with fresh courage, and the conversation grew animated.

"*Bon papa*," she said gaily, "Rosaleen and I must go

shopping, and make ourselves fit to be seen, before we go *anywhere*."

"*C'est entendu*," said the Vicomte, beaming. "I will accompany you, my pigeon. Waiter! Call you this coffee? *Allons*, fetch me, then, tea. I should prefer it. Yes, we will shop—we will buy the elegant toilettes, and astonish the rich Miss Charlotte on our return."

"Do you really mean we may buy everything we want, *bon papa?*" said Kitty, breathlessly.

Two pairs of eyes were fixed on the old gentleman. Rosaleen anxious, Kitty imploring.

The momentary hesitation, born of innate frugality, vanished.

"Everything," he said. "*C'est entendu.*" On reflection he added, apologetically, to himself, "It is but for once."

They looked at each other in mingled ecstasy and doubt.

"Oh, *bon papa*, it is very kind; but are you sure you have enough money?" said Kitty, the fearless.

"The hotel bill—Pélagie said it would be very dear," murmured Rosaleen.

The Vicomte tapped his breast-pocket.

"I have here enough to pay for many toilettes, more even than you will require, and to pay many bills, however dear," he said gravely. "You shall choose what you will. The little mine in Spain permits this extravagance. Afterwards—we will return *chez nous*, and be content, is it not? with so much indulgence."

"Oh yes, indeed," cried Kitty, joyfully. "How delightful to be rich even for one morning! I have always longed to be rich, really rich; I mean colossally rich."

The Vicomte shrugged his shoulders. "If thou wast rich, if thou hadst a great fortune, what wouldst thou do with it—after shopping to thy heart's content?" he asked curiously. "Nay, tell me in turn, my children."

He thought his grandchildren would be puzzled to answer this question, but he did not make allowance for the easy confidence of youth.

"If I had a colossal fortune I should give it away," said Rosaleen, without a moment's hesitation.

"*Tiens*, that would be *simple comme bon jour*. Remain as you are. One mighty cheque drawn, and a good hospital enriched for ever," he said, smiling.

"Oh, *bon papa*," said Rosaleen, reproachfully. "How *can* you think I would shirk my responsibilities like that? It would be most immoral. We must account for our talents; giving away money wholesale would be a very lazy way of doing things. Remain as I am! Certainly not; I should leave home at once and set to work, for it would be the work of a lifetime to give it away properly. I have often thought of it."

"Often thought of it!" echoed the Vicomte, stupefied. "Have you then figured to yourself that it is probable, such an event?"

"Why, of course," said Rosaleen. "These things are always liable to happen to any one, aren't they?"

"Might one ask how?"

"Why, *bon papa*, you *must* know that," cried Kitty. "There are so many ways. Some rich relation, whom you've never happened to hear of, dies—and leaves you a fortune."

"Or you write a book, and grow rich and famous on the spot," said Rosaleen. "Or you marry a very rich man; or, like a story I once read, an old gentleman leaves you thousands of pounds simply because you pick up his umbrella for him, or——"

"We will suppose one of these chances has befallen you," interposed the Vicomte. "*Après*——"

"I should go first, I think," said Rosaleen, "and live

very quietly in a crowded neighbourhood, and make friends with quantities of proud, hard-working people, who wouldn't dream of accepting charity from any one, and who are yet at their wits' ends to know how to make both ends meet. That would be full of delightful adventures, thinking and planning how to help them secretly, and without their ever finding out. Then I should make sure *personally* of making lots of individuals happier, and changing their whole lives. It would be like a fairy tale come true."

"You would not fear the responsibility of changing their whole lives—no, no?"

"Not a bit," said Rosaleen, surprised. "How could it hurt any one to be happier? Even if it did not last, if it was only for a time, and did not do all one expected, yet it would be better than sitting still and doing nothing at all."

The Vicomte smiled somewhat ruefully. How pleasant to be so young and free from doubt!

"Besides that—which would be a recreation—I should build enormous colleges all over the country," said Rosaleen, thoughtfully, "where destitute orphan girls would learn to cook under French *chefs*."

"It would be a good work," said the Vicomte, warmly. "*Tiens! la bonne idée!*"

"But I mean less for grand dinners than for just the *ménage*, unless, of course, they meant to become professional cooks. There would be an infirmary and a *crèche* attached to every college, and the girls would learn to take care of babies, and nurse the sick, and do real beautiful laundry work, and cut out and sew like Pélagie. None of the girls at the village school learn anything useful for the *ménage* of every day. And look how their mothers waste the vegetables in their gardens, cooking everything *à l'eau*," said Rosaleen, mindful of Pélagie's criticisms on life in Luscombe.

"And thou, *mignonne*," he said to Kitty, rather sadly, "wouldst cover thyself with fine dresses and jewels, taking no thought for the morrow?"

"Dear me, grandpapa, I hope I am not so foolish as that," said Kitty, with great dignity. "I should think of my position."

"Thy position! Là, là, là!" said the astonished Vicomte.

"Certainly. I should buy a very fine *old* country place; not an ugly, bald, brand-new thing like Monksbere, I need hardly say; and, of course, it would be in the West Country, where the Trethewys have always lived," said Miss Kitty, tossing her head; "and I should do quite as much good as Rosaleen, only in a far more practical way; nothing foolish and romantic about it. I should employ hundreds of workmen and labourers all the year round, and build cottages wherever they were wanted, and take care of the people openly, as a great lady should. Of course I would have a house in London, too, with magnificent horses and carriages; and I should invite girls who lived in the country all the year round, to stay with me," said Kitty, pathetically, "and not give myself airs more than was proper, but let them enjoy themselves."

"And the poor old life—at Honeycott! The poor old grandfather, where would he be?"

"Oh, *bon papa*, you *know* I should never forget you. You could stay with me whenever you liked in a far more beautiful place than Honeycott. And the coffee should be excellent, for I would have a *cordon bleu* especially for you, as well as a library crammed with books for Rosaleen. And I would frequently come and stay with you myself, and send you my children to take care of, for, of course, I should be married by that time," she ended very calmly.

"*Elles sont impayables*," murmured the Vicomte. "It

is as I thought. Neither would be contented to remain as they are if they knew. They shall know nothing."

It was, perhaps, fortunate for the Vicomte's peace of mind that he did not overhear Kitty's remarks to Rosaleen, as the sisters hurried upstairs to prepare for the great shopping expedition.

"I tell you what it is, Rosaleen; I believe grandpapa has been secretly saving up hoards and hoards of money for years, and now he is a little uneasy in his mind about it, so he has determined to get rid of it all by letting us be as extravagant as ever we like. Depend upon it, as soon as it is all gone, he will hurry us home again as fast as possible. We had better make hay while the sun shines."

When the glories of the West End shops dawned upon their view for the first time in their lives, neither Rosaleen nor Kitty could make up their minds how or where to begin their shopping.

"Let us walk along and look in the windows, and decide what we want most, for I feel as if I should like everything I see," cried Kitty, with a little shriek of ecstasy. "There seems always something a little *more* beautiful further on. Come along, oh, come along, *bon papa!* for I must look at all the windows as quickly as I can before I go inside."

It was not so easy to hurry the Vicomte along.

For one thing, he could not talk and walk simultaneously, and whenever a happy idea occurred to him, he stopped short on the pavement to discuss it at great length.

His heart, besides, was overflowing with kindness towards his fellow-creatures. After his long seclusion, it affected him not a little to find himself once more in the midst of a hurrying crowd. He turned round frequently to gaze at any of his human brothers and sisters who impressed

him, in passing, with admiration, or pity, or interest. He was also quite as much fascinated by the exterior of the shops as his granddaughters were, and could not, like the delighted Kitty, take in a window at a glance; he was obliged to stop and examine it in detail.

"I do not think we can do better than *this*," said Rosaleen, pausing resolutely before a wonderful exhibition of summer gowns, displayed at length on lay figures. "Here are your ready-made skirts, Kitty."

"Paris models," said Kitty, reading the announcement with awe, "and no prices marked. I am afraid they will be rather dear, *bon papa*—but we want to go in here."

"Entrez donc, mesdemoiselles," said the Vicomte; and he followed his little ones proudly into the shop.

For the brief space of an hour did Kitty Trethewy then taste the joys of an earthly paradise.

Beyond the ecstatic pleasure of the moment, she knew neither thought nor care. She forgot her watchful grandfather and her dreamy sister. She saw only ethereal gauzes, snowy muslins, filmy lace, exquisite embroidery, and ribbons of celestial blue.

From this airy world of chiffons she presently drew forth a little store of treasures which became specially her own. *Kitty, her mark*, was stamped upon them with invisible letters in her sister's eyes, who knew Kitty's tastes, and smiled to see how exactly she had gratified them in her careless-seeming choice.

"It is lucky I am tall," said Kitty, fervently, "for that delicious white gown will want no more alteration than Pélagie can easily do in an hour. But oh, Rosaleen, they are all too long for you! What *can* we do? If you would rather, I will wear my old things too, and keep you company."

This was when the shopping had been done, and the

Vicomte's pocket-book considerably lightened of his bundle of bank-notes.

Rosaleen declined to accept this generous offer, though fully conscious of the sublime effort it must have cost her sister. Her own fancy had been captured by an elegant dust-cloak, and she pointed out that what she wore beneath it would not matter at all, since when she put it on, her dress would be completely covered.

"I cannot think it appropriate, though it is very pretty," said Kitty. "But to wear a dust-cloak on a hot May afternoon at a tea-party! Of course you must do what you like; and at least your hat is lovely—quite as pretty as mine."

"Those long soft folds are very becoming," said Rosaleen, firmly. "It is like the classical drapery on the Greek statues in grandpapa's book of engravings."

"So it is," said Kitty; "but it is still a dust-cloak. The woman said so. There *can't* be much dust at a tea-party in Grosvenor Square. At least, I hope not."

But Rosaleen was determined to be arrayed in the classic garment, and Kitty could only console herself with the vision of her own white gown, Leghorn hat, pointed bronze shoes, and six-buttoned gloves.

CHAPTER XIII

LADY DOMAFORD stood just inside the largest of the communicating reception-rooms in her town house, and languidly greeted her thronging guests as they entered.

She looked as bored as she felt, for this was her *omnium gatherum* party, intended to soothe the feelings of all the outsiders whose names disfigured her London visiting-list, as well as to please and flatter any country neighbours who might be in town at this time of year, and who were not sufficiently distinguished to be asked on more important occasions.

Thus Odo had quite unwittingly invited the party from Honeycott to make their appearance in Grosvenor Square at the right moment, and Lady Domaford was astonished at his unusual tact.

Rosaleen and Kitty were much impressed by the string of carriages, the army of servants, and the magnificence of the interior of the house. But their grandfather maintained his presence of mind, and his salutation of his hostess was not less magnificent nor less distant than usual.

The Vicomte did not like Lady Domaford, whose cold manners repelled him, and whose stupidity fatigued his mind.

"I had no idea you ever came up to London," she said vaguely, as she shook hands.

"Madame, the welfare of my little ones required it,"

said the Vicomte, and waved his hand proudly towards them.

Lady Domaford's lack-lustre glance rested for a moment upon Rosaleen and Kitty.

"They are surely too young," she said. "No? How time flies! But at least you should have sent them to school for a year or so before bringing them out."

She was annoyed, not definitely, but vaguely, by the appearance of Rosaleen and Kitty. Why could they not be contented to stay in the country? And the Vicomte—that fat, absurd old man. Everybody was staring at him. Odo was really as tiresome as usual, after all.

"Madame," said old Patrick, bluntly, "it is an easy thing to send the children of other people to school. It costs hardly a pang of regret. Myself, I believe I could deposit your son at the door of his college without emotion."

Here the Vicomte did himself injustice, but it mattered the less, since the attention of Lady Domaford had already wandered. She was absently shaking hands with some former constituents of her husband, whom she did not know by sight, but who seemed acquainted with every member of her family, and asked solicitously after each by his or her Christian name.

Lord Domaford, whose attentive eye was ever upon his wife, hurried forward to supplement her coolness by his own extra warmth.

"My dear good creatures, how delighted I am to see you!" he cried, shaking hands heartily with father, mother, son, and daughter in turn. He had found this mode of address an excellent one in cases where his memory for names and identities was at fault. "Are you certain, are you positive that you have had some tea? Can I get you anything? Ices, strawberries? Such an oppressive day—

so good of you to come. Ah, my dear Mugden, how are you? This is indeed a pleasure."

He had done his duty by his pleased and flattered guests, and turned with relief to a name he knew, and a face he remembered.

"You should have left your cloak downstairs, Rosaleen," said Lady Domaford, coldly.

She belonged to the order of persons who make it a rule to draw attention to what is blamable, and are silent concerning what is praiseworthy in their fellow-creatures; and who, strangely enough, ascribe the habit to honesty rather than to a grudging spirit.

She saw that Kitty's hat was slightly awry, and made haste to tell her so; but she did not observe how smiling and lovely was the little flushed face beneath it, nor how prettily the blue bows contrasted with the pink cheeks and matched the blue eyes; or if she did observe these things she kept them to herself, and the word of praise that would have set the child's heart dancing with delight was withheld.

Kitty did not expect much notice when she perceived the crowds that thronged the rooms; but she knew that she was dressed as she had never been dressed before. She hoped she looked well, and she longed to hear somebody say so.

Bon papa always praised her, but that was just *bon papa's* way. Kitty had small confidence in his impartiality, and believed he would have found Rosaleen and her beautiful if they had been as plain as Lady Domaford herself.

Her innocent vanity was fully awake, and exceedingly sensitive. She fell back from her momentary interview with her hostess, abashed and discouraged; and blushed with mortification as she furtively straightened her maligned headpiece.

"I say, Kitty," said a friendly voice, "you *are* a swell,

and no mistake; I didn't know you. I couldn't think who the pretty girl could be who had managed at last to find her way into one of these unholy squashes of ancient frumps."

Kitty immediately recovered her spirits, and looked delighted.

"Oh, Odo, how glad I am that you have come. I was afraid I wasn't going to enjoy myself at all," she said ingenuously.

"I say, look at the doorway. Who do you think that is? Somebody you've not seen for an age."

"Conrade!" said Kitty, and blushed again all over her little fair face. "Oh, how he is changed!"

"He's turned pretty brown, hasn't he?" said Odo. "I can tell you that chap knows how to play polo. You shall come and see him one day at Hurlingham. There, my mother's got hold of him; it's no use trying to get him away now. He'll have to do the polite all round. He's no end of a distinguished soldier, and all that, and always playing the A.D.C." said Odo, in a would-be careless tone which hardly concealed his pride in his cousin. "Come and have some ices and strawberries, Kitty—this way—through the ante-room, or my father will pounce on me and introduce me to some old woman or other to take down."

He piloted her through the crowd, furtively watching his parents, and sighed with relief as they reached the downstairs buffet together.

Kitty ate her pink ice, and was gleefully conscious that she was enjoying herself after all, though she hoped very much that Conrade would presently come down and replace Odo, with whom she had very little in common, though just now he happened to be making himself unusually pleasant.

"Now, tell me what on earth put it into the Vicomte's head to come gallivanting up to London?"

"It was just *me*," said Kitty, nodding. "I thought it was time Rosaleen and me had some advantages; there we were, down at Honeycott, seeing nobody from morning till night. It isn't fair on a girl," said Kitty, indignantly, "to be nineteen, like Rosaleen, and never have been to a dance in her life."

"Much Rosaleen cares for dancing," said Odo, with a grin. "Come, Kitty, draw it mild. You know she'd rather be hunting through a musty old bookshelf than go to a dance any day of the week."

"Well, she ought to be cured of it, then," said Kitty, sincerely. "It's very bad for her. Dr. Luxton always said she read too much. But I dare say it *will* be more cheerful now Charlotte is at the Court, only it would be *very* humiliating to owe one's first dance to *Charlotte*."

"I shouldn't care who I owed it to, so long as I got it," said Odo. "Dances bore me to death; but I tell you what, Kitty—I'll make my mother give one, and ask you and Rosaleen to it."

"Oh, Odo! You are the nicest boy in the whole world. Will you really?" said Kitty, breathlessly. "But she'll never do it, I'm afraid."

"Won't she?" said Odo. He felt pleased with himself for the kind thought, and with Kitty, who looked so grateful and so pretty and happy. "You see if she doesn't. There's Conrade. I knew he was bound to turn up, sooner or later, over the refreshments. Conrade!"

A tall young man, bronzed and dark-haired, conducted an elderly lady carefully to the table, and brought her some tea. He turned in answer to Odo's suppressed call.

"Aren't you going to speak to one of your oldest friends,

old fellow?" whispered Odo. "Here, I'll do the civil to Lady Bartley, and leave you to talk to Kitty."

"Kitty," said Conrade; "you don't mean to say this is little Kitty."

"Little Kitty, indeed," said the maiden, and laughed in his face.

She was not so tall, however, but that Conrade could look down upon her still.

"Why, you were only a little girl when I saw you last."

"I was nearly thirteen."

"Then you must be seventeen now."

"I never could do arithmetic," said Kitty, and laughed.

What a delightful party, she thought. Crowds of ladies, and none more expensively dressed than herself! Only one or two young men in the room, and of those few no less than two proving themselves ready to neglect the others and talk to her. A pink ice, a *méringue*, and now Conrade —grown bronzed and moustached, and looking at her with the unmistakable light of astonished—almost unwilling—admiration in his handsome brown eyes.

Kitty was still young enough to class the ices and *méringues* with all the other enjoyments crowding upon her.

She was too much excited to perceive how much attention she attracted from the languid and constantly changing throng at the buffet; but the glances cast upon his companion were by no means lost upon Conrade, and increased his own startled appreciation of her loveliness.

For Kitty was very lovely in her new attire. In figure tall and shapely, her laughing cherubic face yet retained its childish beauty of colouring; her gay blue eyes their heavenly purity of tint.

Conrade tried in vain to assume a critical attitude towards the humble playmate of his childhood. He

decided that the oval of her face was a trifle too short; the delicate eyebrows too slight, the change of expression too frequent; then his heart suddenly leapt to scorn his deliberate effort to criticize the charming innocence and natural grace of this rustic maiden—this child who was yet a woman, though she looked almost too angelic for a work-a-day world.

He was obliged to confess to himself that he had never in his life seen any one prettier than Kitty; nay, any one half so pretty as she looked at this moment, in her white dress, in the shaded room, with the blue ribbons of her summer hat tied in a bewitching bow underneath her soft, round chin.

It was fortunate, Conrade reflected, that he was a cool and calculating person, little likely to make a fool of himself, otherwise it would have been impossible to predict what might happen. He was not in a position to please himself like Odo, Conrade thought, with a little bitterness.

He was fond of Odo, but, like his uncle and aunt, he could not help sometimes making involuntary comparisons.

Not all Conrade's cleverness, nor his good looks, nor their wishes that their son could rival his easy pleasantness and popularity, had caused Lord and Lady Domaford to forget for a moment that their almost penniless nephew occupied a very different position from that which Providence had granted to their unsatisfactory son and heir.

Conrade had desired to enter the Guards; he had a taste for society; his best friends at Eton and Sandhurst had joined the brigade, and he had hoped that his uncle would be influenced by his success at school and at the military college to take a pride in his career.

But Lord Domaford foresaw that Conrade's natural extravagance would be encouraged if he furthered his wishes in this direction. He spoke as seriously to his

wife's nephew, of the increased allowance he would be obliged to make him if he went into the Guards or the cavalry instead of into the line, as though those few hundreds would be missed from his large and increasing income; and he dwelt forcibly and at tedious length upon the poorness of Conrade's prospects, and the expenses of his education.

Conrade, with outward calm and inward bitterness, had acquiesced; but he scorned his uncle none the less for his meanness, reflecting upon the enormous sums Sir Gregory Copp had given to charities before his coveted peerage was attained, and on the salaries paid to his head gardener, his stud groom, and his Austrian *chef*. A hundred or two, more or less, would have made no difference to his uncle, as he knew very well; but what a difference to him!

Young Waldron had set his teeth, and resolved to carve out his fortune for himself; a healthy and natural resolve, had he possessed means and opportunities to carry it out.

But fortunes are not to be made by young subalterns in the line, as he very quickly discovered.

He was fond of sport, had been brought up in the midst of luxury, and never learnt to practise the economy his uncle preached.

His tastes and habits led him into debt and difficulties innumerable, and, applying to his adopted father for assistance, he was met with reproaches he never forgot or forgave. He was too proud to mention the subject to Odo—three years his junior, and a boy at school; but Odo found out that his cousin was in disgrace, and never rested till he discovered the cause.

His mother had some reason to complain of his boorish rudeness and plain speaking upon this occasion, and Sir Gregory no less.

Nevertheless Conrade's debts were paid, and Conrade

learnt, from his uncle's indignant letter, that young Odo's generous partisanship had procured him this favour.

The poor boy was with his regiment at Lucknow when he received this letter—homesick and heartsick; full of miserable shame and anxiety, which gave place to an almost equally wretched relief when he read it, and realized that his difficulties for the moment were tided over.

His uncle's reproaches and reminders were constantly in his thoughts, spoiling his longed-for exodus from the station into the Christmas shooting-camp, whither he had been invited. He dwelt bitterly upon his dependence and his obligations, and upon the unkind written words which his uncle forgot almost before posting his letter and cheque, but which were burnt upon Conrade's memory as he crouched among wet reeds, making indifferent shots at duck; or as he sat by a camp fire, drearily endeavouring to share the heroic mirthfulness of a large circle, all more or less affected by sad recollections of the season; or as he travelled back to duty in a train which registered one hundred and eight degrees of heat.

He tried to shake off the intolerable sense of insult by vowing he would never accept another penny from his uncle, and as he vowed, his monthly mess bill was put into his hand. Two hundred and seventy-three rupees, and his pay was two hundred and fifty-six a month.

A bitter satire upon his uncle's admonition that India was a cheap place for a young man to live in, and that he ought to put by his allowance and live on his pay.

He had been careless and extravagant, no doubt, but the punishment of contempt and reproach lay heavy on his soul, as such punishment lies heavily on the soul of many a poor young soldier far away from his people, striving to keep his head above water and keep pace with his comrades at the same time; and imbued with the oddly inconsistent

tradition that it is his duty to be as careful of his money as he must be careless of his life.

Conrade learnt his lesson; and his uncle imagined him greatly improved when he received no more applications for money. But the boy's heart was hardened, and his naturally sunny and generous temper was clouded. During the years that followed he kept his own advancement steadily in view, and his ability and tact earned their reward; though there was nobody to take any great interest in the details of his career.

From time to time his letters to his uncle and aunt contained allusions to transport and signalling courses, to examinations in Hindustani, to his pleasure in acting as aide-de-camp to a distinguished personage, when, no doubt, his good looks and good manners, no less than his talents, befriended him; to his good luck in accompanying an expedition on active service.

But these indications that Conrade was prospering in his career filled nobody's heart with rejoicing. No trembling mother or sister awaited with agonized prayers and hopes the next news from her boy in India, engaged on a wild expedition to quell the rising of a people she had never heard of, in a place with an unpronounceable name; or scanned the gazette a thousand times in vain, and once or twice with incredulous joy and triumph at seeing his name in print, or his services rewarded by a decoration.

His uncle's interest in him was of the most placid description; and his aunt, when he was out of her sight, never thought about him at all.

Conrade stood by himself; and though, at first, he had awaited the mail from England almost as wistfully as those who knew that it would surely bring them words of love and longing, yet in time he grew indifferent, and ambition

took the place of affection which had been denied its natural outlet.

He had left England a warm-hearted and rather impetuous youth, accustomed to carrying all before him at school, and never doubting his ability to do the same in the world. He returned a man, having learnt wisdom through many disappointments, and the measure of his own unusual powers by many successes, according to the opportunities his profession had afforded.

His uncle and aunt expected him to stay in his adopted home, but Conrade did not devote himself exclusively to his uncle and aunt, and they began to rate their nephew's company a little more highly when they perceived that he was in request elsewhere.

His father's family now showed him some attention. They took more interest than Lord and Lady Domaford in events outside the British Isles, and were glad to know that their young kinsman had proved himself a gallant soldier. They took some pains to make his acquaintance, and were captivated by his good looks and his talents. Conrade was excellent company; he sang, danced, and acted well; was an accomplished polo player, a fine cricketer, and reputed to be an excellent shot. He amused the Duke his cousin, and the Duke his cousin invited him to make Alnoth his headquarters.

Conrade took care to let his uncle know that he had accepted this invitation. The Duke showered kindnesses upon him—compliments, invitations, and introductions. Everything, in short, but money; but for this commodity Conrade was still indebted to Lord Domaford, and therefore he bore himself somewhat more haughtily towards his uncle and aunt than he would have done had he been less poor and less in their debt.

Lord Domaford was often vaguely annoyed with his

nephew, who towered over him physically, and made him feel mentally small, though he could not explain to himself why, since he believed him to be totally ignorant of business, politics, and finance—questions on which Lord Domaford felt himself an expert.

But Conrade was still young enough to lay down the law without hesitation upon a variety of topics, and he would not only differ from his uncle quite easily and gracefully, but also express himself with a fluency and happiness of argument which his uncle could not emulate. It was certainly aggravating that he should possess powers which, had they been bestowed upon Odo instead of his cousin, would have fitted him exactly for that place in Parliament which his father was so desirous he should occupy.

Lady Domaford, however, was rather impressed by her nephew's distinguished appearance and air of melancholy superiority.

She found him both useful and ornamental, and he fell naturally into the position which Odo ought to have taken, and never did take, of the attentive son of the house. His experience as an aide-de-camp caused him to be even more useful at parties than Lord Domaford himself, to the bored and indolent hostess.

On his side, Conrade was careful to fulfil such duties conscientiously. He gave a proper attention to each person, and no more. On this occasion he determined, however, to enjoy the relaxation of five minutes' chat with little Kitty. The meeting with her somehow appealed to his memories of boyhood; it was as though the gay blue eyes he remembered were looking at him out of his light-hearted past.

Little Kitty had been too young to be a playmate or companion to Conrade, but he had condescended now and then to join in the children's games, and he remembered carrying that most engaging and merry little cherub on his

shoulder. Though he had scarcely thought of her since, her smile brought back to him the recollection of those careless days at Southerleigh; the sunny lawn at the Court, with its old cedar tree, and cooing doves, and the old-fashioned kitchen-garden leading to Honeycott.

Southerleigh Court was less magnificent than Monksbere, but far more comfortable and homely and cheerful; and Conrade had been king of his company there, obeyed and followed by his admiring juniors, though his leadership invariably led to disaster.

Many childish recollections made them smile at each other.

"Somehow I never thought of finding little Kitty grown up, and in London," he said. "Let me put down your plate. Would you like anything else?"

"Yes, please," said Kitty, promptly. "Another *méringue*. They are quite delicious. I have always longed to taste a *méringue*."

Somewhat astonished, Conrade made a dive between two backs, and secured the coveted dainty.

He watched her eat it.

How very small those white teeth were—too small, like a doll's. Here was a defect! and what an appetite she must have! Two *méringues!* He tried to feel disgusted; but Kitty was evidently enjoying her tea so much that it was difficult not to sympathize with her. After all, how pleasant to be so young, and have such a healthy liking for sweet things.

"Where are you staying? I must come and see you," he said, "directly I can find a spare moment."

He meant to be distant, but in spite of himself fell into the easy tone natural between people who have known each other from childhood.

"We are staying at an *hotel*," said Kitty, proudly; "and

I should enjoy it very much," she added, with a sigh, "only——"

"Only——" said Conrade, bending down a little as she hesitated.

"Only," said Kitty, colouring, "people in London are rather rude—they stare so at grandpapa."

"At grandpapa!" said Conrade.

Kitty had spoken without self-consciousness, and Conrade was instantly annoyed with himself for not recognizing the fact. But she was quick-witted, and the slight inflection of his tone called a lovely flush of colour to her face.

"I beg your pardon," said Conrade, without meaning to say anything of the kind, but he was vexed with his own stupidity. How could he have been so foolish as to cause his old playmate to blush by insinuating a vulgar conventional compliment?

He had placed himself at a disadvantage.

"Don't be silly," said Kitty, severely. "Whom should they look at but grandpapa?"

But her eyes forgave him.

"Is *he* changed too?" said Conrade.

"He is a little stouter, I think," said Kitty, reluctantly.

"Impossible!" said Conrade; and they both laughed.

"Didn't you see him? He was upstairs, and so was Rosaleen."

"How can one see anybody in this crush? Dear little Rosaleen; is she as grave and quiet as ever? I can fancy how she would be lost in this crowd. All the rooms were full. I came later than I was—ordered to come, as a matter of fact," said Conrade; "but I had to go and see my doctor at such an unearthly hour."

"Are you ill?" said Kitty, with round eyes of pity.

"I'm all right now. I had a touch of fever, and came home on sick leave, you know, or I shouldn't be here; and

I go to report to my medico from time to time. He's a nice old boy. I wonder why great doctors always lean back and put the tips of their fingers together when one is nervously retailing one's symptoms, don't you?"

"I suppose they must do *something* to show they know more than you do," said Kitty. "I hope he said you were not to go back to India for a long, long time."

"That's just what he does say. But I am afraid I shall have to go back in the autumn for all that. However, I have enjoyed my spring, and I hope to enjoy my summer first."

"It won't be Charlotte's fault if you don't," said Kitty, "for she means to keep open house at Southerleigh this summer, and to invite us all there whenever we like."

"Charlotte!" said Conrade; and he laughed as Odo had laughed at the recollection of Miss Fish. "Wretched Charlotte! I hope she is as easily taken in and as full of woe as she used to be. And is Mrs. Trethewy the same old tartar as ever?"

"No, indeed! It is Charlotte who is the tartar now."

"Good old Charlotte! I'm sure I'm very glad to hear it," said Conrade, warmly. "It's certainly her turn. How well I remember coaxing her to mount the donkey and then luring the poor beast under a young conifer, and poor Charlotte's astonished head sticking out through the branches at the top."

"She has made great friends with a young American lady, Miss Zoe Brett; and she is coming to stay at the Court too. We shall be quite a large party," said Kitty, happily.

"Miss Zoe Brett," said Conrade. His interest was suddenly quickened. "I met her at Alnoth House last night; you don't mean to say she's going to Southerleigh?"

"Indeed she is. Charlotte met her at an hotel when

she first came to England early this year, and knew nobody, and they made friends."

"Knew nobody! She's gone ahead pretty fast, then," said Conrade, with a short laugh.

"Is she so very pretty?"

"Yes—no—I hardly looked at her. Not nearly so pretty as—lots of other people," said Conrade, and his dark eyes were expressive as they rested on Kitty's face; "but she has something better than looks."

"Do you mean money?" said Kitty, composedly.

"I suppose I do." He laughed rather shamefacedly.

"Charlotte told us they were rich."

"I should think they *were* rich. Old Silas is the younger brother of John Brett, the man they call the Iron King or the Copper Emperor, or some such name. Whether he is as rich as his brother I don't know, but he's credited with the intention of handing his daughter over a million or so when she marries."

"And she's the cousin of grandpapa's friend, who used to come and stay with us; that's how Charlotte made his acquaintance," explained Kitty. "Don't you remember? You must have heard of him. The man from America?"

Conrade shook his head.

"He is coming again this summer, and his name is Iron Brett," said Kitty, cheerfully. "Don't you think I ought to go upstairs now, Conrade, and find grandpapa and Rosaleen? I notice nobody stays long at this party. I suppose it's not the fashion."

Conrade realized that he had outstayed his five minutes, and that it was Kitty and not himself who was proposing to end their *tête-à-tête*.

He was half amused and half offended.

But the crowd was really melting away, and he escorted her to the doorway.

The Vicomte and Rosaleen were already in the hall, and the old gentleman was gratified by the unaffected warmth and grace of the young man's greeting; but Rosaleen took occasion to whisper to her sister—

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty, you were quite, *quite* right. This abominable dust-cloak has spoilt the whole afternoon. Even Odo noticed it."

"I told you so," said Kitty, delighted.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Vicomte dozed in his green chair in the shade of the Park trees, and Rosaleen and Kitty watched the gaily dressed or frock-coated Londoners passing and repassing on foot, and criticized the ladies and gentlemen cantering up and down the Row.

The sunshine and the bright colours made the scene a cheerful one, but Kitty and Rosaleen were by no means contented to find themselves mere spectators. They were not surprised that the Vicomte could smile over the situation, however, both during his waking and his sleeping moments, for they were under the impression that the old and the middle-aged are overjoyed to look on, whilst other people amuse themselves.

The last few days had appeared somewhat empty of excitement after the delights of Lady Domaford's party. Odo had returned to Oxford, and Conrade had left a card at their hotel, but he had not repeated his visit, as Kitty had hoped that he might.

She was too inexperienced to make allowance for the multiplicity of May engagements, and felt not a little sore and disappointed at his non-appearance.

It was no doubt delightful to possess a quantity of pretty clothes; but, as it takes less time to grow accustomed to good fortune than to suit one's self to the reverse, so Kitty already thought little of the pleasure of wearing her becoming attire, and much of the mortification of meeting nobody who was likely to be impressed by it.

She went to picture galleries to please Rosaleen, and to Westminster Abbey and the British Museum to please her grandfather, but she was so much bored at the latter place of entertainment that she nearly wept with fatigue and dulness.

"You only like people, and never *things*," said Rosaleen, resignedly. "I suppose it is because you are young. I have often noticed that grandpapa goes to the other extreme; he is mad about things, and indifferent about people. He is never anxious for any one to come and see him, whereas if a new kind of caterpillar happens to turn up, he is quite excited."

"One must expect old people to grow a little odd in their ways," said Kitty, mournfully. "Oh, Rosaleen, look at that very handsome dark lady with the green gown and the pink parasol. That is the sixth gentleman who has taken off his hat to her. How happy and proud she must feel! And other ladies are always stopping to speak to her. She has invited three to lunch already. I wish she would invite me. What is the use of being in London when one knows nobody? It is a dull, wretched place, and the Park is full of noise and glare."

"Do you see the pretty baby girl in blue?" whispered Rosaleen. "I smiled at her just now, and she only stared at me quite offended, as though she were a grown-up person."

"I do not think Londoners have very good manners. Country people are much more friendly," said Kitty, dejectedly. "Still," she added, brightening up, "it will *sound* very well, when I write to Charlotte, to say, 'We sat in the Park this morning. It was very bright and sunny, and everybody was there. Rosaleen and I looked our best in our new embroidered muslins.'"

"Charlotte won't want to know how we looked. She

has seen us, and knows only too well what we're like," said Rosaleen, shaking her head.

A merry group gathered on the gravel walk before them, and amid much laughter and greeting and barking of little dogs, made various appointments for meeting again, and dispersed as merrily as they had met.

"Can't *one* of them speak to us?" cried Kitty, in a sudden burst of exasperation.

"Kitty! When they don't even know us!"

"They never *will* know us at this rate," said Kitty, and the tears actually flooded her blue eyes, and dropped on to the spotless folds of her new gown.

In consequence of her emotion, and of Rosaleen's sympathy, neither perceived the quiet advance of a gentleman who had been for some time observing them attentively from a distance.

They both started when a strange, yet oddly familiar voice addressed them.

"What's the trouble now, Miss Kitty?"

Two astonished faces met the twinkling gaze of Mr. Iron Brett.

"Why, how *did* you recognize us?" cried Kitty, in glad tones.

He glanced with humorous expression towards the Vicomte's chair.

Old Patrick slumbered in the sunshine. A peaceful smile irradiated his face beneath the martial moustache. His felt hat was tipped over his ferocious snowy eyebrows; his large soft hands were crossed upon the knob of his mighty walking-stick between his brown holland knees.

"I recognized the Vicomte," said Mr. Brett, softly.

"Grandpapa feels the heat. He always goes to sleep in the Park," said Rosaleen, apologetically.

In their turn the sisters examined Mr. Brett.

Their first impression was that he seemed to have dried and shrunk a little with the passing of the years.

He was not nearly so tall as they had formerly supposed him to be; he was lean and brown; his dark hair was sprinkled with silver threads, and his thin face had a great many lines in it.

His teeth were white and even, and his grey eyes were very bright; but these were the only signs of youth the man from America displayed. His face was so immovably grave that he might have been almost any age, although in reality he had but just entered upon his thirty-fourth year.

Rosaleen and Kitty were disappointed. Iron Brett did not look like a hero, and yet he had occupied for many years in their imagination the position of a hero.

He was surprised, later on, to learn that the painted satin *bonbonnière* he had given them was still regarded as an almost sacred relic of his visit, and esteemed among their greatest treasures.

"To be sure you could hardly have recognized Rosaleen and me," said Kitty, laughing. "It is ten years since you came to Honeycott, for I remember that Rosaleen was nine then, and I was seven. Oh, *won't* you sit down and talk to us?"

"If I shan't discommode you." He took the chair next to Kitty, and smiled at her.

"Why have you never been to Honeycott since?" she asked.

"I haven't visited England since," said Mr. Brett. "I meant to come to Honeycott before I returned to America. I'm rather a busy man, Miss Kitty, and I've got my work to attend to."

"I thought you were so rich!" said Kitty, thoughtlessly, and then blushed.

He smiled at her again; this time rather tenderly.

"Well, I don't see what that has to do with it."

"Surely a rich man has no need to work?"

"He has just as much need as any other. If a man isn't doing something all the time he feels pretty miserable, and pretty useless too. In America every man works for his living. He works to justify his existence. We don't grow more drones in America than we can help."

"But now you are taking a holiday, I hope?" cried Kitty.

"I am having a pretty good time," he admitted.

"And your cousin—your pretty cousin, whom Charlotte told us about—is she having a good time too?"

"She's having a good time too," he said, with his quick, pleasant smile. "I'm taking her to the opera to-night."

"The opera!" said Rosaleen. She spoke for the first time, and the words were hardly uttered aloud, but Mr. Brett caught them.

"If I could persuade you and Miss Kitty to come along with us, I believe my uncle and aunt would be very grateful to you. They have to make believe to like sitting up at night for Zoe's sake, but they get tired, and I believe they'd be glad to be excused. If the Vicomte would care to come too, the box will hold a good few, and Zoe would be very glad to have the opportunity to make your acquaintance."

Rosaleen and Kitty regarded each other with sparkling eyes.

"It would be delightful!" said Rosaleen.

"Let us wake up grandpapa, and ask him at once," said Kitty, joyfully.

Her tears and her loneliness were forgotten. Only one friend had appeared, but his arrival had changed the whole aspect of the Park for Kitty. The noise was cheerful, and the glare merely the brightness of the sunshine. London

was the pleasantest and most agreeable place in the world.

On the same evening the Duke of Alnoth happened to be at the opera with his wife.

He enjoyed the reputation of being one of the poorest dukes in England; but he was of a cheerful disposition, went racing, and took no thought for the morrow. He told his only son that it would be a good thing if he married money, and Lord Kerswell agreed that it would be a good thing, but nevertheless he remained a bachelor.

He aided his father to the best of his ability by helping him to cut off entails and raise money whenever or wherever it was possible to do either, and hindered him by feeling obliged to gratify very expensive tastes of his own.

The Duchess tried to help them both by living as economically as her position allowed, and by seeking to throw heiresses in the way of her son, in the hope that he might some day mend his position by a wealthy marriage.

An enterprising relative had brought to her notice the name of Miss Zoe Brett, and presently introduced the young lady herself to her Grace, informing her at the same time of the amount of the dowry Mr. Silas Brett would probably bestow on his only child.

The Duchess immediately took a fancy to Miss Zoe, invited her to Alnoth House, and placed Lord Kerswell next to her at luncheon. The meeting effected, she troubled herself no further in the matter.

"You may lead a horse to the water, but you can't make him drink," she said oracularly to the Duke. "It is my duty to give Tommy every opportunity, but I'm no schemer."

The Duchess was perhaps not a schemer, but she might have held out a helping hand to Miss Zoe Brett had she

not perceived that the pretty little American girl greatly preferred to manage her own love affairs, and was very well able to attract Lord Kerswell, or any other man, without the assistance of his mother.

Tommy and his cousin Conrade occupied the back of the Duke's box, where they heard what they liked of the music, and saw nothing at all of the stage. Their position, however, afforded them an uninterrupted view of the occupants of a much larger *loge*, in which a tiny and exquisitely dressed little person, with a Madonna coiffure, and a small sheaf of lilies on the ledge before her, held the place of honour.

To this box their attention was somewhat unnecessarily directed by the Duke, who was inspecting it through his opera-glasses.

"Of all the beautiful faces I ever saw in my life," he remarked in deliberate tones, "I think the one I am now looking at in Miss Zoe Brett's box is the loveliest. I wonder where your little American friend picked her up. I suppose she is another millionairess."

"Heaven grant she may be!" said Kerswell, fervently; "for unless it is distance that lends enchantment to the view, I feel much inclined to run round and try my luck on the spot." He spoke in a jesting tone, quite void of offence, but Conrade shot a glance of fiery indignation at his unconscious cousin.

"The young lady whom I presume you are talking about," he said rather haughtily, "is Miss Kitty Trethewy. She is the granddaughter of the old Vicomte de Nauroy, who lives close to my uncle's house."

"Then I hope, like a good fellow, you'll introduce me to her," said Tommy, unabashed.

"Kitty Trethewy—sounds like an eighteenth-century toast, eh?" said the Duke. "Good heavens, what colouring!

No wonder Master Conrade is in a hurry to get back to Devonshire."

"I have known her and her sister all my life," said Conrade. He felt that his face burned, and that he was speaking with unnecessary emphasis, but for the life of him Conrade could not help himself.

He was puzzled to account for the agitation which possessed him, since he was quite certain that Kitty was nothing to him. A little country neighbour with a pretty face; no more. Conrade had no intention of being carried away by the admiration he was obliged to own he felt for Kitty's prettiness.

Yet he was unreasonably annoyed with Kerswell, as during the next interval the cousins left the box together, to pay their respects to various ladies of their acquaintance.

"I am going to Miss Brett's box. Come along," said Tommy. "You are a lucky fellow, Conrade—as free as air; but I shall presently fall a victim to one or another of my parents' unholy schemes."

Conrade vouchsafed no answer save a sulky intimation that he had no intention of accompanying his cousin, and Kerswell shrugged his shoulders and walked off by himself.

"They all take it for granted that I can do what I like," thought Conrade, gloomily, "which is a polite way of saying that I am such an unimportant person that it doesn't matter who I marry or how poor I may be. Damn Tommy's impudence, and his airs and graces! I hope he won't try them on little Kitty. He'll have to reckon with me if he does. I won't have her made a fool of by that little ass."

Lord Kerswell was innocent of the slightest desire to give himself airs, and his modesty would certainly have stood a favourable comparison with Conrade's own. He felt that he had somehow offended his cousin, and could

not for the life of him imagine why Conrade should be so ready to take offence.

"I almost wonder my father is so devoted to him," he thought to himself as they parted; "for though he can certainly make himself jolly enough when he likes, and is deucedly clever and all that, yet he has the devil's own temper when he's annoyed, and can't stand the most feeble attempt at chaff without being put out."

Conrade looked in to speak to a lady whom he knew very well, and, in spite of her protestations, departed almost instantly. Her box afforded no view of the one which held Miss Kitty Trethewy. He sought another box, where abode some people with whom he was scarcely acquainted, and behaved with an *empressement* that caused the chief occupant to fear that he must be attracted by her young daughter, for whom she had very different views. She was therefore barely civil to Lieutenant Waldron, who was as unconscious of the younger lady's encouragement as of her mother's dismay.

Opposite him Tommy could be descried, seated between Miss Zoe Brett and Miss Kitty Trethewy, and very obviously devoting his whole attention to the latter.

What did Kitty mean by talking and laughing so freely with a fellow she had never met before in the whole course of her existence? That is what came of a girl having no mother to look after her. Where had she learnt to dress herself up like that? Surely her gown was far too rich for so young a girl.

Conrade was angry with Kitty for the pearl-embroidered satin which fitted her slender rounded form like a glove,—for the milk-white throat and shoulders half displayed and half shrouded by a cloud of tulle,—for the rose which her regrettable vanity had caused her to place in her bright hair,—and for the lovely smile with which she listened

to Tommy. But his anger with her was a small thing compared to his anger with Kerswell.

He had no idea that a little heartache was hidden in Kitty's bosom, beneath the satin gown and the bunch of rosebuds fastened at her fair breast; or that a pair of blue eyes were now and then wistfully directed towards his conspicuously tall figure as he appeared on the opposite side of the house, and in another box than hers.

Why did not Conrade come? Surely, even if he did not particularly care to speak to her again, it was unkind.

The funny little man with the round, chubby, red face and curly hair was very amusing, and Zoe had pointed him out to her already, and told her he was the future Duke of Alnoth—but he was not Conrade.

Young Waldron's bitter jealous feeling would have surely disappeared had he known how calmly country-bred Kitty regarded the noble marquis. He was only a funny little man in Kitty's eyes, not to be taken seriously in any relation of life; whereas Conrade was a hero—a soldier and a man, a handsome young knight—carving out his own fortune in the world with only his sword and his strong arm, and his clear eye and brain to help him. There was the difference between a god and a mortal in Kitty's estimation of the cousins.

Miss Zoe Brett, however, was more impressed by the importance of Lord Kerswell, and fully alive to his admiration for Kitty.

She was generous enough to be amused by the easy transfer of his attentions from herself to her new friend.

The sensation was a novel one, but Zoe had been too much accustomed to a monopoly of such attentions wherever she went, to attach extraordinary importance to the defection of one of her numerous cavaliers. She amused herself very well without Tommy, holding a little

court in her corner, and introducing every one who came in to Rosaleen and Kitty; for she was determined they also should enjoy what she was pleased to call "a good time."

It was astonishing that she should have managed to collect so many friends during such a short residence in London; but her looks, her wit, her wealth, and the warm friendship of the Duchess of Alnoth had combined to assist her.

She managed her parents almost as entirely as Charlotte had declared, and was as determined in will as she was diminutive in stature.

Under the circumstances it was fortunate that she was an exceedingly shrewd and bright little girl, and, in spite of her wilfulness, almost worthy of the deep admiration and pride with which her father and mother regarded her.

In face she bore a strong resemblance to her cousin Iron, and owned the same bright gray eyes; but hers were softened and shadowed by thick black eyelashes, and looked from a little pale pure face, with delicate features and pointed chin. Her brown hair was parted plainly above those striking black-lashed grey eyes, and knotted low on her neck; and she was dressed with a Quaker-like simplicity, infinitely costly, and most diverting when taken in conjunction with her reckless extravagance and the magnificence of the jewels with which she was loaded by an adoring father.

Zoe made the acquaintance of Rosaleen and Kitty, and fell in love with them simultaneously. Iron Brett, who had introduced them to each other, observed with amazement the rapid growth of a friendship which sprang up, like Jonah's gourd, in a single night.

After the manner of mankind, he could not help wondering how Kitty and Zoe could have so much to

say to each other upon such a short acquaintance; and though he was of a singularly patient disposition, he wished they could have kept all their conversation for the intervals, instead of indulging in whispered confidences during the performance of the opera.

Rosaleen sat in the back of the box, where, as she said, she could cry as much as she chose when the music affected her; and Kitty, who cared nothing for music, and rated the opera no higher than the strains of the band which had enlivened their dinner, declared that she could not conceive how any one could wish to cry under the circumstances in which they found themselves. But perhaps Mr. Brett understood, for he liked music quite as much as Rosaleen did, and knew a great deal more about it.

He sat beside her, and next to the continuously slumbering Vicomte, during the performance; and when the intervals came, he slipped away and made room for the younger men, who came to pay their homage to the little American girl and her lovely companion.

But Conrade did not come; and the cluster of rosebuds that pretty Kitty wore upon that evening of her triumph concealed a single thorn.

CHAPTER XV

"I SHOULD think we had very little left to learn about London now," said Kitty, joyfully. "We have done almost everything. We have dined at restaurants, stayed at an hotel, done the picture galleries, the opera, and the shops, and now we are actually going to a ball."

"Lady Domaford said it was to be quite a small dance," said Rosaleen.

"Large or small, she would never have asked us to it at all if it hadn't been for Odo," said Kitty. "I never could have thought that Odo would grow up so nice. He quite spoke out when she said she was afraid we should find it very dull, not knowing anybody; and he said he and Conrade would look out for that. Not know anybody, indeed! I know four gentlemen in London altogether, not counting grandpapa—and I am sure three of them will ask me to dance; at least, I hope so. It was very nice of Zoe to tell us her dressmaker's address, and help me about the gowns. Why is it so nice to be helped by Zoe, and so altogether hateful to be helped by poor Charlotte, who means just as well?"

"Because one always *knows* Charlotte is sure to tell somebody all about her help, sooner or later, and tell it in her own way," said Rosaleen, thoughtfully; "whereas Zoe has the *kind* of delicacy and reticence that makes one trust her without reserve."

"And the most excellent taste," said Kitty; "the

dresses are dreams. I hope not too conspicuously lovely. However, white is always sure to be right for young girls, I suppose; though you can hardly be called a *young* girl, Rosaleen, at nineteen."

"No, indeed," said Rosaleen, in good faith.

"And it is good form for sisters to be dressed alike. Your scarlet geranium and my blue forget-me-nots will make just the right distinction between us."

"I am *sure* of the scarlet geranium," said Rosaleen, whose fingers trembled with excitement as she fastened the glowing blossom into the soft thick coils of her raven hair. "But I am not so sure of the gown for me as for you. I can't help remembering that Charlotte said I was too dark to wear white."

"Charlotte is *always* wrong," said Kitty, calmly. "She said I was too tall for light colours, if it comes to that. I tell you what, Rosaleen—Charlotte may say what she likes, but it's my belief that we are *both very pretty*; and, if anything, I am by far the prettiest of the two."

It was understood that Lady Domaford was to *chaperon* her young neighbours upon the occasion of her dance; but the Vicomte could not deny himself the pleasure of conducting his little ones to Grosvenor Square; and as the invitation had been verbal, he had by no means understood that he was not meant to be included in it.

The old gentleman therefore dressed himself with great care, and assumed all his orders and medals to do honour to the occasion. But he had not thought it necessary to order a new coat for himself, though he was willing to spend so much money upon the dresses of Rosaleen and Kitty.

Lady Domaford was indignant when she beheld him standing in a corner of the splendid yellow saloon,

conspicuous for his great size, his shabbiness, his mysterious decorations, and the beaming expression of his placid face, ornamented by so large and ferocious a moustache.

"I thought it was expressly understood that I was to *chaperon* those two girls," she said to her son. "How tiresome you are, Odo! Look at that fat, ridiculous old man filling up the whole room. He is absurd-looking, and quite out of place."

"If he was an ambassador, or a foreign royalty, or anybody of that sort, you'd be kow-towing to him like anything," growled the inconvenient Odo. "I'm sure he looks like somebody of the kind."

"Indeed he does not—in that dreadful old coat. Everybody is wondering who he is," said Lady Domaford, indignantly. "It is just like you, Odo, to bring people of this sort upon me in London. They are all very well in the country. Conrade would never have made such a foolish mistake."

"Wouldn't he?" said Odo, with a grin; but he was too good-natured to direct his parent's attention to Conrade, who was at that moment dancing with Kitty.

Conrade had taken counsel with himself.

"I will dance with her *once*," he thought sternly, "and no more."

He looked disapprovingly at Kitty. She was standing in a corner of the room, very tall and lovely, towering above the square, bald-headed figure of her host, who was introducing to her notice an unimportant young man. Lord Domaford meant to be kind, and could not help being patronizing. There were not many nobodies in the room; but such as there were he took pains to introduce them to each other.

The young man bowed nervously, and led Kitty away to take her place among the dancers.

Conrade tried to look away from that little classic head, long slender neck, and soft white shoulders, generally visible among the crowd by reason of Kitty's height. But his eyes were drawn to the vision almost in spite of himself.

Oh, innocent face of angelic fairness, and blue, reproachful eyes! Kitty's look, unconsciously wistful, met his own, and his resolution faltered. He claimed her as soon as the dance was over—almost before it was over—from the dull young man with whom she was dancing, and from whose arm she so gladly withdrew her own.

"*One* dance," thought Conrade; "and perhaps one more later in the evening, when I have done my duty to everybody in the room. It would be unkind not to dance with her and Rosaleen, because they are old friends, and among strangers who know and care nothing about them."

But the strangers appeared to take very kindly to the pretty sisters.

Neither lacked partners, and both were too much engrossed to observe how early their grandfather took his departure.

Perhaps the Vicomte was more clear-sighted than Lady Domaford supposed him to be; at any rate, so far as the feelings of his hostess were concerned.

He remained only a short time to watch the enjoyment of his beloved little ones; standing alone, a queer, conspicuous figure in a gay, indifferent crowd, with the snows of eighty winters on his venerable head, and the light of eternal youth in his gay blue eyes.

He contented himself with a magnificent bow to Lady Domaford as he made his slow way down her palm-shadowed marble staircase, but he shook hands with his host, and thanked him in tremulous tones for the pleasure which Rosaleen and Kitty were enjoying.

"My dear good man," said Lord Domaford, fussily, "you must not go without supper. I insist—I implore—nay, I would come with you myself—but you will understand"—he lowered his voice—"his royal highness—I must be on duty until he leaves. He probably won't stay very long."

"I understand perfectly," said the Vicomte, and he waved his hand in token of farewell.

He wept a little, as he drove home in his solitary cab, at the thought of his children's happiness.

He was growing very old, and felt as though his beloved little ones were somehow slipping from his grasp. Their childhood had faded into the past, together with his own youth—and the friends, and the feasting, and the fighting of his youth.

The angelic babes he had cherished were gone for ever, and in their place stood two mortal maidens, holding out their white arms to life, with their fair faces turned away from him, and their bright eyes gazing gladly into the future. To-night he had felt himself like a ghost, looking on at a strange world which had succeeded his own dead world, and with which he had nothing at all in common.

"It is time," thought the Vicomte, dismally, "that I went back to my hermitage at Honeycott, where these sad thoughts did not afflict me, and where I could occupy myself with my garden and the making of my soul." But he knew in his heart that Rosaleen and Kitty would never be contented with Honeycott any more.

Upon his arrival at the hotel his melancholy reflections were, however, immediately dispersed; for, instead of finding himself, as he expected, alone in the dingy sitting-room, he was joined there by the son of his old friend.

"I came round, Vicomte, wondering if you would allow me to smoke a cigarette in your company," said Iron Brett.

"Balls are not very much in my line. The Duchess of Alnoth is taking my cousin Zoe to this one; and, to tell you the truth, Lady Domaford forgot to send me an invitation." His eyes twinkled.

"*Ma foi*, but I am not altogether certain she expected me," said the Vicomte, candidly. "But we may bewail our exclusion in concert, *mon ami*, for I stayed scarcely five minutes at this so brilliant an assembly, of which the chief ornament, it appeared, was the son of a prince whose father was not too proud to accept my hospitality in my youth. I recognized him in a moment by his likeness to his grandfather. But this is ancient history," he sighed. "Thou findest me, my son, in a great perplexity."

"Why, what's the trouble this time, Vicomte?" said Mr. Brett, good-naturedly. "Not money, I believe?"

"But yes, in a sense, it is money," said the Vicomte, who, however desirous of keeping his own counsel, found it next to impossible to resist confiding his thoughts to a sympathetic auditor. "To you, from whom I conceal nothing, I will tell all. Thou hast seen my little ones—*elles ne sont pas vilaines, hein?*"

The American expressed his admiration of Rosaleen and Kitty in terms which did violence to his natural imperturbability; but the Vicomte's vanity, though gratified, was by no means sated.

"These little angels have given me a happiness indescribable for many years," he said mournfully. "But they are certainly no longer children. Figure to yourself that the younger, scarce out of her cradle, is already *mondaine* to her finger-tips. Never would she content herself with the *vie de campagne* did she know that it was in my power to afford her always the gaiety she desires. And the other, the living image of my Rosalie, who took the world as it came and was incapable of a melancholy

reflection, singing from morn till night—she is, if you will believe me, a philanthropist in embryo, of the most serious. Yes, actually a philanthropist." And he looked at his friend in dismay.

"Is that so?" said Mr. Brett, sympathetically.

"What to do? I have questioned them. With reserve, you understand. And I perceive that the day I make known to them my so colossal wealth, I shall lose these charming ones," said old Patrick, weeping. "Also I shall lose, what is almost worse, the life I love, the *vie de campagne* that I desired to live until the end of all things came for me. But this life, so frugal and quiet, appears incompatible with the possession of great riches. *Quoi faire?* Am I to hide my wealth and thus, perhaps, after my death, incur the reproaches of my little ones, who will believe their grandfather was a miser, grudging them the enjoyment of his money during his life? *Dame, ce serait par trop fort!* I cannot rest at night for this terrible uncertainty which oppresses my soul."

"Best give away the whole pile in a lump, Vicomte," suggested Mr. Brett; and his bright grey eyes surveyed the old gentleman kindly.

"Nay; my children, who are naturally wiser than their grandparent, have revealed to me," said the Vicomte, with a sound between a groan and a laugh, "that it is not thus that a good man may part with his money. He must make inquiry, he must work, he must give with discretion; he must, in short, quit his retirement, and assume responsibilities towards his fellow-creatures which would ensure the loss of his leisure and his tranquillity for evermore. It is only thus that the *bon Dieu* can be appeased, or look graciously upon a mortal afflicted with vast possessions; or so think these little angels, who are certainly nearer the heart of the *bon Dieu* than you and me."

"I guess that is so, Vicomte," said Mr. Brett, gravely.

He lighted a fresh cigarette, and reflected humorously upon the situation created by his father's well-meant benevolence towards his old friend.

"I believe that if I were in your place, Vicomte," he said presently, "I should just go on as I was for the present."

"But I pine for the country, for my peaceful days and calm nights," groaned the Vicomte. "I do not disguise from you, my friend, that I find late hours fatiguing, and the air of the theatre exceedingly bad. Besides, though the climate of London is certainly maligned, it is not pleasant as the air of Devonshire. The roses are also blooming in my garden, and I am not there to behold them. This may appear to you a little thing, but to me it is, nevertheless, an insupportable reflection."

"The London season won't last for ever," said Mr. Brett, consolingly. "I should opine you'd sacrifice something to give Miss Rosaleen and her sister a good time, and they're certainly having a good time. But when the hot weather comes they'll be going down home again, and I hope they'll find it possible to have a good time there too. We're all coming along in July, if you'll have us. My uncle and aunt and Zoe are to stay with Miss Fish, and I hope you'll let me occupy my old quarters in your house."

"Everything I have in the world is at your disposal," said the Vicomte, with enthusiasm.

"I was very sure you'd say that," responded Mr. Brett, gratefully, "and I believe I'd feel as near being at home at Honeycott as I could in any place outside the United States. In the mean time I believe it would be as well to let your grand-daughters' suitors know nothing about this money."

"Suitors!" gasped the Vicomte.

"Yes, sir. When two young ladies as pretty as that

grow up, Providence generally sends a man or two around to fall in love with them. A face like Miss Kitty's is not to be seen every week-day, and most often not on Sundays either. God Almighty only manages to create a face of that kind once in a while. It is a face that doesn't require a backing of dollars to make it lovable. I have *seen*," said Mr. Brett, emphatically, "enough of fortune-hunters, during the past few months, to last me quite a spell; say till the millennium comes round, when I suppose they will cease to be. Some of us could spare them a while earlier."

He relapsed into a dejected silence.

"I have not yet thought of their marriages. I will confess to you that they appeared to me too young. I have planned nothing of the kind for their future," said the Vicomte. "Yet it must certainly come; it is certain that I must part with them in the end; but I hoped that the time had not yet arrived. I have left these matters to arrange themselves."

"I believe you have taken the best course open to you," said Mr. Brett, gravely.

"But I perceive the excellence of your argument," said the Vicomte; and his countenance brightened. "Yes, I can assure myself of the disinterestedness of the young men—who, in English fashion, shall presently come to me to demand the hands of my little ones—by continuing to conceal from their knowledge the amount of the wealth that will certainly be theirs. It is an idea! It had not occurred to me. Thus will my silence be justified. You bring me once more consolation. Dear and amiable young man, I thank you with all my heart."

"The consolations I have brought you hitherto, sir, have not turned out so successfully as I could have wished," said Mr. Brett, smiling.

"You have brought me the happiness of knowing you,

my friend," said the Vicomte; and he seized Mr. Brett's hand and pressed it, with emotion. "I will not deny that I have been tempted of late to wish thy father's *chateau en Espagne* had tumbled about our ears, instead of proving itself to be in reality as full of gold as he predicted."

"It appears to me," said Mr. Brett, somewhat ruefully, "that my father has caused you pretty considerable annoyance by his thoughtless conduct."

"Think not that I reproach him," cried the Vicomte, in simple good faith. "How could he or I—*enfin*, how could any one in their senses foresee that a few thousands invested in an almost forgotten corner of Spain, *un pays presque inconnu*, should produce these millions of francs, of which even my bankers write to me with respect. But thou hast consoled me. My children will marry; but certainly they will marry, and thus I shall hand over to them the responsibilities, which they will undertake with light hearts. *Dieu de dieux*, I shall be a miserable old man without them. However, it is certain that I shall be less miserable at home than if I were forced to accompany them upon their missions of gaiety or of putting the world to rights," said the Vicomte, with a return of his habitual philosophy. "For me the world may now wag as it will. I have made my adieux some time since."

He laughed so gaily that Iron Brett perceived that his good spirits were completely restored, and he presently bade his father's friend good night and left him to the repose which the Vicomte assured him he would now be able to enjoy, undisturbed by the problem which had lately perplexed his slumbers.

Mr. Brett, too, was inclined to laugh, as he walked quietly back to his own hotel.

"If I wrote an account of this interview to my father,"

he reflected, "I shouldn't wonder but what the old man would be cured, right away, of ever wanting to play Providence any more as long as he lived."

Conrade danced with Kitty not once, nor twice, but sufficiently often to draw upon himself the displeased observation of his aunt, who was by no means delighted to observe the sensation caused by the beauty of her obscure little country neighbour.

He could not help perceiving that Kitty was enjoying a *succès* by no means usual to a pretty nobody in a London ball-room.

But her loveliness was of no common order.

Royalty itself was pleased to be attracted; and Lady Domaford's light eyes, already prominent, almost started out of her head when she beheld the astonishing spectacle of Kitty Trethewy, laughing and talking quite as gaily and naturally as usual, with the exalted personage whose mere presence caused Lord Domaford's over-insistent politeness to sink into a slavish servility as painful to behold as to endure.

Conrade was not sure whether he were pleased or not that Kitty should be the recipient of these attentions. He was relieved to find her frank simplicity unimpaired by the ordeal.

"He was very nice and cheerful, and he talked funny broken English, but very fair French," she reported gaily. "He complimented me upon my French, and said I ought to learn German, because it was the most beautiful language of all. And I said I liked French better, and he laughed. And oh, Conrade, the Duchess of Alnoth has asked me to lunch, and Rosaleen too. Will you be there, do you think?"

"Of course I shall be there. I am staying with them,"

said Conrade, rather gloomily. "I suppose that was Kerswell's doing?"

Kitty observed the gloomy inflection, and her heart throbbed. Was it possible that Conrade—*Conrade*—could be jealous of that absurd little round-faced boy? Lord Kerswell was so rosy and plump and so curly-haired, and Conrade so bronzed and stern of feature and expression, that she had no idea how much older than his soldier-cousin was the absurd little round-faced boy. She thought that perhaps Conrade *was* jealous, and that it was for this reason he had not come to speak to her at the opera.

"I think it much more probable that it was Zoe's doing," she said. "The Duchess brought her here, and it was Zoe who introduced Rosaleen and me to her."

"Very officious of her," said Conrade. "I should have preferred to make you known to my cousin myself."

"Don't be cross," said Kitty; and she smiled at him so appealingly that he relented, and smiled unwillingly in return. "I want to know such lots of things, and I've been saving them up to ask you."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, principally, who some of the people are. I know nobody at all, and feel very strange, and you seem to know everybody."

"Indeed I don't," said Conrade; and he uttered a genuine sigh. Kitty was so quick of understanding and so sympathetic that it was difficult not to be confidential with her; be a man never so determined not to betray his preference for her society. "I feel very nearly as much out of it all as you do, Kitty, after my long exile. There is time for most things, and people too, to change in four years. Even my uncle and aunt have changed. I wish to Heaven," he added, with discontented energy,

"that they were not *quite* so busy being Lord and Lady Domaford."

"I know what you mean, but I dare say they will get used to it after a time," said Kitty, consolingly.

"I can understand *him*," said Conrade; "it's more or less what one expects, I suppose. But I really cannot understand my aunt. And yet in some ways I think she is rather the worse of the two."

"Yes, she is," said Kitty, promptly. "She talks about *his lordship* to Rosaleen and me."

Conrade laughed in spite of himself, and of his annoyance at the want of breeding displayed by his newly ennobled relatives.

"What impertinence!" he said. "Such a very young lordship too, only a few months old—hardly bears mentioning yet. I shall drop my aunt a hint that people are laughing at her, or, better still, my uncle; hints are lost on Aunt Virginia."

"Oh, don't do that," said Kitty, in haste; "she might take the hump and give no more delightful balls."

"She won't give any more this season," said Conrade. "If Odo hadn't insisted, she'd never have given this one. So we had better make hay while the sun shines. Shall we take another turn?"

"First tell me, who is the lady with the stiff diamond crown and the elaborate hair, sitting as though she had swallowed a poker? Lord Domaford is always talking to her."

"Hush, hush, you must not be so outspoken," said Conrade, laughing. "She is a very great swell, Mrs. de la Rivière. It is a wonderful condescension for her to come at all."

"Why is she so stiff and staring?"

"Because she knows the royalties, I suppose," said Conrade, shrugging his shoulders.

"Do they like people to be like that?" said Kitty, astonished.

"You little goose! When she's with them she's quite friendly and affable."

"Would they be disgusted to know she took airs with other people?"

"Not in her case, I should think," said Conrade, smiling. "They must know it's a dreadful effort for her to be pleasant at all."

"An effort?"

"Don't you see she's as dull as ditchwater by *nature*," said Conrade, impatiently. "Where brain and heart are both wanting, it must be difficult even to *seem* interested in other people. She is a fashionable woman though; I suppose because her father and mother are a most popular and delightful couple. She certainly couldn't be anything on her own merits."

"It is odd that people should be so unlike their parents," said Kitty, glancing at her host, who was excelling himself in his efforts to charm away the exceeding frost of Mrs. de la Rivière.

"Poor old Odo wouldn't trouble himself to bask long in the light of that vacant smile and stony glare, would he?" said Conrade, sarcastically. His manner changed and his voice softened. "Poor old Odo! Nobody knows so well as I do what a good fellow he is. I believe he was about the only person who ever thought about me when I was out in India. His faithful scrawls were worth their weight in gold to me. I got so little news from home."

"Oh, Conrade!" cried the tender-hearted Kitty, "if we had only dreamt—Rosaleen and me—but you would not

have cared for our letters. We were only little girls, and did not know you very well. But now—it will be quite different when you go back—if you must go back," she faltered.

"Would you write to me now, Kitty?" said the young man. He meant to be prudent, but the blue eyes were so pitiful for his past loneliness, and the sweet face so near his own, that Conrade's heart beat fast, and the words came from his lips almost involuntarily.

"Of course I would write. But it is so different now. You are not lonely now," she said, with a little sigh, as though she wished—and indeed this was the case—that he were still lonely enough to wish for sympathy. "You must have plenty of friends in India now, as you have here. And you are a hero; everybody is proud of knowing you, and would be only too glad to write to you," said Kitty.

Her praise was very sweet to Conrade. As she looked up into his dark face, with blue eyes more expressive than she knew, he felt that this innocent, unconscious worship made amends to him for many dark hours passed; for hardship and peril and suffering endured; long forgotten by others, or unknown to any save himself.

He saw himself a hero in Kitty's eyes, and the perception gave him a sensation of humility mingled with natural gratification.

If he had been in a position to marry, if he could have afforded to please himself, Conrade thought that it would be hard to find a wife more sympathetic, more companionable, more altogether womanly and attractive, than this same beautiful Kitty, whom he must not and would not love. For though to her grandfather Kitty instinctively showed only the childishness that he expected from her, the womanly side of her character was very apparent to Conrade.

"Our dance, Miss Trethewy," said a voice in his ear; and Kitty's next partner claimed her and led her away.

Conrade woke from his dream of bliss with a start, and hastened back to fulfil his duties as aide-de-camp to his uncle and aunt.

Meanwhile Lord Kerswell paid a good deal of attention to Rosaleen, but she could not help finding out that he danced with her in order to talk about Kitty.

"I shall be staying with the Copps—I mean the Domafords—this summer or autumn. They've very kindly asked me down for their son's coming of age. So I hope we shall meet often, as Conrade tells me they are near neighbours of yours," said Tommy, politely.

"I'm afraid we shan't meet *very* often," said Rosaleen, ingenuously, "for we never go to Monksbere when there are people staying there; or at least when there is a large party; for of course there is always some one."

"But I may come and see you, I hope?"

"You *could* come and see us, of course," said Rosaleen, doubtfully. "If you thought it would amuse you. But Honeycott is a very small place, and though the garden is very pretty, there is so little of it, that you could see it all in five minutes. However, I forgot; there is Charlotte. If you didn't mind calling on her. There will be plenty to do at Southerleigh, for we have sent her tennis and croquet things, and she means to entertain us all."

"Of course I will call on Charlotte," said Tommy, beaming. "And who is Charlotte? She sounds quite delightful."

"You will have to call her Miss Fish," said Rosaleen, laughing. "I know it is a ridiculous name."

"She can always change it, I am sure, at will," suggested Kerswell, gravely; "and for the present I think I would

rather go on saying Charlotte, if you don't mind. It sounds more friendly, especially as I mean to play tennis and croquet with her. She can call me Tommy if she likes. Everybody does."

"And yet you do not look like a Tommy," said Rosaleen, smiling. "One pictures *Tommy* quite differently, as Kitty says."

"And how does Kitty picture me, I wonder?" he asked eagerly.

"You are really too fond of Christian names," said Rosaleen, reprovingly.

"I will be more careful in future; but Kitty—I mean Miss Kitty, or, as my father called her, Mistress Kitty Trethewy—is such a suitable name for your sister, for she looks as though she had stepped out of a picture, or the pages of an old-world romance. May I tell you, by-the-by, what my father said about her? No, he is not here; he never goes to dances. He saw her at the opera."

"Of course you may tell me," said Rosaleen, anxiously.

"He said—and he is not generally an enthusiastic person—that she had the loveliest face he had ever seen."

"Did he really?" said Rosaleen. She flushed with pleasure, and her dark eyes looked very kindly at Tommy. "Do you mean that Kitty is—that she would be considered a—a beauty?"

"Indeed I do mean it. Everybody here to-night is raving about her. Have you never seen it for yourself?" he said.

"I have always thought her very—pretty," said Rosaleen, softly. "But, you see, one doesn't think much about looks—in the people one loves best in the world. To me she is just—Kitty."

"And do you love her best in the world?" asked Tommy, in a very gentle and respectful tone.

She looked at him and saw that he was serious. Tommy nad a nice face, though it was also undeniably a round and red and rather comical-looking face. Good-nature beamed from his little bright eyes, beneath his arched brows and curly hair. Dimples lurked in his clean-shaven cheeks, at either corner of his wide and humorous mouth, and one was placed in the centre of his plump chin.

Rosaleen, as she looked, decided that Lord Kerswell must have been a dear little boy, and that it was a pity he ever grew up. She had not the faintest notion how much worldly wisdom was concealed beneath the curly hair; nor how shrewd and just an appreciation of men and things shone in those twinkling honest eyes, which could look so sympathetic when their owner chose, as he chose now.

"Yes, I love Kitty best of all; even more than my grandfather. We have only each other in the world to care for, and she is my only sister. When she was little I used to feel like her mother. I do still, sometimes. But she is cleverer than I am now in some ways," said Rosaleen, with perfect simplicity.

He would willingly have discoursed longer on the subject of Kitty; but Rosaleen was claimed by Odo, who took her down to supper; and had, as usual, not a few confidences to make to her on his own account.

"I say, Rosaleen, why didn't you tell me what a perfect ripper that little Miss Brett is. I never saw any one like her! No wonder Englishmen are all for marrying Americans if they're like *that*," said the complimentary Odo. "Look at the fit of her gown, I trouble you!"

Odo was at an age when even the least æsthetic of young men are apt to discuss such details rather seriously, and Rosaleen had already received his advice on the subject of Kitty's dress, and his criticisms concerning her own.

"That girl knows how to dress. She's perfection from

head to foot. There's not much of her, I grant you," said Odo gravely, "but what there is of her is simply—well, it's *great*. And she's so amusing."

"She's very original and very sweet," said Rosaleen, warmly.

The whimsical reflection crossed her mind that it was her fate to listen to the praises of other maidens from the young men who danced with her.

She also reflected that Odo, as a rule, was given to singing nobody's praises, and she was secretly amused at the enthusiasm which he now evinced regarding Miss Brett.

"There'll be some fun coming down to that dead-alive old Monksbere this summer, with Conrade at home again, and that dear little thing staying at Southerleigh. I declare I quite look forward to going over to the Court and seeing old Charlotte again. It will seem like old times," said Odo, with the sigh of the lovelorn; and he was evidently so much in earnest that Rosaleen did not dare to smile.

She was not quite sure whether she had enjoyed the ball so very much after all, though it had been delightful to watch Kitty's triumph, which, after the fashion of sisters who have never known separate interests, Rosaleen regarded as partly her own; and though Odo had been kind and attentive throughout the evening, and found her a great many pleasant partners, Rosaleen did not care for dancing as Kitty did, and was given to philosophizing in the midst of entertainment.

She kept her thoughts to herself, and sought no sympathy from Odo or any one else, being mindful of his lectures on priggishness, and exceedingly sensitive to possible ridicule. But the poor little dreamer could not help seeing the sadness of tired eyes beneath the sparkling of diamonds,

and reading sermons in the drooping of the flowers beneath the artificial light. And if she were incapable of her sister's whole-hearted youthful enjoyment of gaiety, the fault was Nature's rather than her own, who had bestowed on Rosaleen a temperament inclined to melancholy, and a disposition to penetrate to the heart of life as it really is, which beats so far below the glittering surface of life as it appears to be.

CHAPTER XVI

Charlotte's Letter.

"My dear Kitty,

"I do think you might write to me sometimes, and tell me what you are doing. Zoe Brett, who goes out much more than you and Rosaleen, has written me several quite long letters.

"She says Rosaleen spends nearly all day at a modelling class, so I thought best to write to you, as I can't help hoping you are not wasting the only time you may ever get in London like that. But we all know Rosaleen only cares for unpractical things of this sort, so one must make excuses for her, since, after all, she was much the same when she was a little girl, always thinking of fairy-tales, and so on. She seems to me rather old to be taking lessons in anything, however.

"The croquet set you sent me was very nice, but rather dearer than I expected, and one of the balls does not look to me as new as it might. I have written to the Stores to ask what this means. And I hope you will also go and speak to them about it. I do not see having to pay for things unless they give satisfaction.

"My decorations are nearly done, and you will not recognize the Court; I have changed all the wall-papers, etc. I have had most of the work done in Domaford, so that no one can say I don't patronize the local tradespeople; and how I have slaved over it all, showing the workmen what

to do and how to do it, and hurrying them all the time; no one could believe who hadn't been through it.

"I have told Mr. Webber that I am going to give a school-feast this year; he seems to think that as Lady Domaford gives one that is enough, but I pointed out to him that Southerleigh and Luscombe have nothing to do with the Copps, and that the people must learn to look up to me. He had not a word to say, as everybody knows that it is the owner of Southerleigh that is the squire of the parish, and the lord of the manor, or in this case lady.

"It is rather a good thing that Odo Copp comes of age this summer, as there will have to be festivities of some kind at Monksbere, and however much Lady Domaford may dislike the local people, she will have to invite them. This will make the place much more cheerful than usual. I hear she has become more disagreeable than ever since they got their peerage.

"Everybody has called on me, even the family at Buscombe Villa; you remember the Hortopps, whom we didn't know. I think it is great impertinence, as I hear he used to keep a shop, and only retired because he came into some money. But that is the worst of being a newcomer, everybody takes advantage.

"I shall invite them to the school-feast, and not to my garden-party. This is the best snub I can think of; tell me if you can think of a better.

"Mamma is growing odder in her ways every day. She takes no interest in anything I do, and is always telling me the place costs more than it's worth, and pointing out the advantages of selling it. This is simply because she wants to go back to Plymouth, as I tell her. She won't even come to church with me, though I have had the squire's pew relined and new curtains put up. She goes to chapel—

Little Bethel, or whatever it is called—as she used when she was young. I cannot help feeling it must have been this which encouraged the Hortopps to call, as they are chapel people too, otherwise I really do not see how they could have dared. They never came near the place in your father's time.

"I do not know what has come over mamma lately; she sits and reads travels and good books, and leaves tracts about in the conservatory and under the seats of the carriage, and she is not going to appear at my garden-party, as she has given up the pleasures of this world. The fact is, she is taking to religion in her old age, and, as you may suppose, this is very unpleasant for me.

"One way and another I have a great many worries, especially with the servants, but I can tell you all this when you come. One comfort is that I have sacked the lot, and am going to send for a new batch from Plymouth, as then they will have no friends at Luscombe, and can't care about going out, or having the villagers to tea.

"I have had rather a row with James Luxton, who is too fond of giving advice without being asked for it. I have a good mind to take the Southerleigh affairs out of his hands altogether. Dr. Luxton comes to see mamma nearly every day (she is very anxious about her health, I must tell you; this is another fad), and says that the business connected with this estate has been in the hands of the Luxtons for centuries. I surprised him well by replying I thought if that was the case it was high time to make a change. I suppose he told his brother, and this may be the reason why James Luxton is so short in his manner.

"I hope you will not be staying on in London much longer. I thought you told me you were only going up for a fortnight. It cannot be very good for your grandfather

"The Duke was not at all what I expected him to be like, but just nice and jolly like his son, whom you will see for yourself, as he is coming to Monksbere, so I invited him to your tennis-parties. I did not tell grandpapa what you said about Johnny, as it's sure to be all right if the Broomes are there, so I saw no use in worrying him. I am sorry my letter isn't so long as yours; still it's the longest I ever wrote, and I've told you everything I can think of.

"Yours affectionately,

"KITTY."

Charlotte could hardly sleep after the receipt of this letter.

"If I had known, I would have stayed in London, and never come down here at all," she said to her mother, with tears in her eyes. "I have a very good mind to go up as it is. Why Rosaleen and Kitty should go running about after dukes and duchesses like this I cannot think. It is very unsuitable. What will the son think when he sees them at home? In a wretched thatched cottage like Honeycott, with only one servant? I can't think how they dare. It is like going to Alnoth House under false pretences. I wish I had stayed in London."

"I told you so; but you were in such a hurry to rush down here. Of course you wouldn't listen to me," said Mrs. Trethewy, in sour tones of satisfaction.

"How could I tell Zoe would be taken up by grand people like this?" cried Charlotte. "She knew nobody at all when we were in London in March. She was going over to Paris because she found London so dull. I tell you what, ma, if you will stay and receive all these new servants, I'll ask Zoe if I may go up and stay with her for a day or two. She can't say no, as she's coming here."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said her parent;

"you have often told me you prefer to manage your household affairs yourself. I only came here for respectability's sake. I would much rather be in Plymouth, as you know very well, and if you go to London I shall certainly return there. I am not going to stay here all by myself. A nice moment for you to choose to go to town to see your fine friends, when nobody has asked you, and everybody is packing up to come away."

Charlotte was obliged to console herself with the reflection that her fine friends would soon be coming down to her; she was also glad to remember that Lord and Lady Domaford were expected to return to Monksbere earlier than usual, in consequence of the festivities for the coming of age of their son and heir.

The Vicomte's joy in returning to his home was so profound as to be almost solemn.

The very tables and chairs, the books and ornaments, seemed, in his eyes, to be offering him a dumb welcome as he scanned their familiar faces; silent witnesses and reminders of sunny or sorrowful hours passed in their company.

The inhabitants of Honeycott arrived on an afternoon in late July.

The rain was falling lightly on the last of the new-mown hay, as twilight deepened beneath heavy grey clouds. The dried soil drank it in thirstily, hardly changing colour, so swiftly did the drops trickle through the cracks in the baked earth.

Over a rustic arch a blush rambler flung clusters of tiny roses, fast withering, to meet her white brother, steadily climbing towards her embrace.

The tall lilies were opening their last reluctant buds to the gentle caresses of the warm summer rain, and the petals of full-blown roses fell trembling at its touch

The Canterbury bells swung in the breeze and chimed not; and the bright yellow of the calceolarias stood forth with startling vividness in the half-dusk above the lifted wet velvet faces of the pansies.

The Vicomte, though he detested rain quite as sincerely as his white cat, Chéri-Mignon, detested it, yet took one hurried, rapturous turn in the garden before he could enjoy his evening meal.

Pélagie, scarcely less thankful than her master to be restored to her home, was already busy among her pots and pans in the bright, warm kitchen.

Mrs. Broome had left little to be done, and her voice of welcome had scarcely died away.

The sisters were together in their green parlour upstairs.

They had not lighted the candles, and the room looked small and bare to their unaccustomed eyes; yet it was their own, and both were conscious of a pleasurable sentiment in beholding it once more.

"Kitty, I shall turn the old bull-house in the orchard into my studio. It is the only place I can think of with a north light. All the windows in the house look south."

"Shall you?" said Kitty, absently. She was curled up in the window-seat, with her chin on her hand, and her elbow on her knee, gazing into the dusky garden, where the Vicomte's ponderous figure was to be descried, slowly making the tour of his domain, bending over the borders, and peering at the flowers.

"Oh, Kitty, if you knew what it was like to have found your work at last. I have been feeling for years like a dumb person who has something to say, and doesn't know how even to *begin* to say it."

But Kitty was in love, and when people are in love they are seldom interested in the ravings of would-be artists; or,

indeed, in anything or anybody outside the radius of their own especial paradise.

"My hundredweight of clay has arrived, and it is in the potato-cellar; Johnny has damped it just as I asked him," said Rosaleen, too happy to observe her sister's lack of sympathy. "It was so heavy he could not lift it. Broome had to help him to carry it. Mr. Brett has promised to give me sittings directly he arrives, and meantime I shall work at copying my beautiful plaster cast of the head of Apollo; but later on——"

Her words died into ecstatic visions. She saw in her mind's eye all her poetic and elusive dreams frozen into marble, to bewilder the multitude with their beauty.

But Kitty's only vision in the matter being that of her sister smeared and pinafored, frantically squeezing, thumping, and cutting masses of wet clay, she was naturally unable to follow her hopeful fancies, or even to be much excited at the prospect of the reproduction of Mr. Brett's features, or the copying of Apollo's head. The only head that appeared at all interesting to Kitty at this moment was a living one, ornamented by a dark moustache and a pair of handsome brown eyes.

She remembered with astonishment that a year or two since she had actually been attracted by the very inferior personality of Mr. Percy Hortopp, and laughed and blushed at the recollection of her own passing folly as a grown-up person smiles pityingly over the infatuation of a child for a valueless plaything.

"To think the Bretts and—and everybody will be here by the end of the week!" she murmured, "and this is Tuesday! How I hope it will be fine. The weather will make all the difference to our being able to make it pleasant for—for Zoe and—Mr. Brett."

Rosaleen was recalled to earth by the name.

"Oh, Kitty, though London was so wonderful and so delightful—in different ways, both to you and to me—aren't you a little glad, after all, to be at home again?"

Kitty looked away to the east, where the rounded tops of the Monksbere woods and the high square towers of the house were still visible against the evening sky.

"I expect I shall be glad—presently," she said, with a smile and a blush that were hidden by the gathering darkness.

CHAPTER XVII

"I SHALL polish all my neighbours off at one blow," said Charlotte, not meaning any violence to the country-side, but merely that she was about to give a garden-party to her acquaintance. "Everybody has accepted, and I only hope there will be enough food to go round," she added, looking rather doubtfully at the *buffet* arranged in the long dining-room at the Court. "Ma kept on persuading me to cut down the list, though I am sure the Domaford confectioner was very reasonable. Even *I* was surprised at the prices he proposed, and so was Mr. Brett. Weren't you, Mr. Brett?"

"Having sampled the sandwiches at your request, Miss Fish," said Mr. Silas Brett, dryly, "I am less surprised than I was. I incline to the opinion that the Domaford confectioner has made a profit. His outlay at the start must have been trivial."

Charlotte knew that Mr. Silas Brett was considered amusing, so she laughed directly he began to speak, without troubling to listen to his words or to consider his meaning. She was engrossed by her preparations, and above all by her anxiety to know whether Lady Domaford would condescend to honour the entertainment with her presence.

"I shall be miserable if she doesn't come. You know what an affected old cat she is," said Charlotte, thus gracefully describing her longed-for guest to Miss Brett. "Of course she has accepted; she couldn't very well help it, me being her nearest neighbour and all; but she is very fond

indeed of pretending to be ill at the last moment, I am told, and disappointing everybody. It is her way of showing her importance."

"Well, I shouldn't want to have her come, if she's like that," said Zoe, consolingly, "and she's not a bit amusing, anyway. I believe I'd rather Mr. Copp and Lord Domaford came without her."

"I am sure *they* will come, and I expect they will bring Conrade and Lord Kerswell and all the other men staying in the house," said Charlotte; "and, after all, it's having plenty of men that makes a party a success. And Zoe, I do hope you'll stick by me, and not be always with Kitty."

"But I'm real fond of Kitty," said Zoe, reproachfully. "She's just lovely. You shouldn't be jealous, Charlotte."

"I'm not exactly jealous. But what I feel is this, I met you first, and *you* wouldn't have known Kitty if *I* hadn't; and she has a sister of her own, and I haven't. I look upon you as a sister," said Charlotte, plaintively.

Zoe made a little *moue*, as she was engulphed in her friend's overwhelming embrace; but she was accustomed to the admiration of many girl-friends, and bore with Charlotte's frantic devotion as good-naturedly as possible.

"I have so much more in common with you than with the others. You are so clever and so well read; that appeals to me, and yet you are not a mere bookworm like poor Rosaleen."

"Why, I don't *begin* to think in comparison with Rosaleen," cried Zoe, indignantly, "and as for being well read, I've read nothing but what every girl I know has read too. We think a lot more about books in America than you do in England, it seems to me."

"A person in my position has little time for reading," said Charlotte, with dignity. "Ma subscribed to a circulating library when we lived near Plymouth; but there

is nothing of the kind worth mentioning in Domaford, and sending backwards and forwards for books at *this* distance is a great trouble and expense. I should not feel justified. Keeping up this place costs a great deal more than I expected."

Charlotte's predictions were fulfilled, and Lord Domaford arrived—beaming, explanatory, and apologetic—without his wife.

The young hostess was partially consoled by perceiving that he had brought with him a larger contingent than she had hoped of the guests staying at Monksbere.

Lady Domaford's visitors generally found their hostess so dull that they were glad to escape from her presence even for a few hours.

On this occasion the gathering at Monksbere included several young men, principally college friends of Odo; two or three middle-aged married ladies, contemporaries or relatives of his mother; and one young unmarried one.

The party, thus unevenly balanced in age and numbers, was not a particularly successful one; and the only middle-aged lady who enjoyed herself was the mother of the young one, who rejoiced to behold her child thus shining unrivalled. Lady Magloire was perfectly aware why she and her daughter, Lady Grace Trumoin, had been invited to Monksbere; and had, in fact, almost discussed the matter openly with Lord Domaford, and thrown over several important engagements in order to accept this invitation.

Lady Domaford had also been taken into the confidence of her lord; and since she desired extremely that Odo should marry and have a son, and not less sincerely that he should marry anybody but Rosaleen or Kitty Trethewy, she showed more friendliness than she usually displayed for her guests towards Lady Magloire; and it was her own

brilliant suggestion that no unmarried girl save Lady Grace should be invited.

"He danced with her twice at our dance," she said to her husband, "and if only those Trethewy girls were out of the way he might easily fall in love with her. But I did not like the way he insisted on my giving a ball just for Rosaleen and Kitty—dancing with both of them over and over again."

"Pooh, my dear," said Lord Domaford. "He looks upon them as sisters. He can't marry them both. If you show any dislike of them you will drive him to champion them. You know how contradictory and pig-headed Odo is. They can't compare with Lady Grace. Let us have Lady Magloire and her daughter to stay, and give them unlimited opportunities of being together, and be very sure she will manage the rest for herself. She would be the very wife for him. Charming manners, and strong will of her own, and great ambitions. The Trumoins are one of the oldest families in England, and have great influence, and are related to everybody. It is exactly what I should like for Odo."

"Then he is sure not to do it. When does he ever do anything we like?" said Lady Domaford, peevishly. "Mark my words, it will be one of the Trethewy girls."

"He can't marry without anything to live upon, and I can easily settle that matter," said Lord Domaford, triumphantly. "There are some advantages, my love, in being what the world calls a self-made man. Odo must inherit my title, of course; but my house and my lands and my money are all my own, and he hasn't a penny in the world, nor ever will have, but what I choose to give him. He knows that very well, for I have taken care to point it out to him."

"Don't be silly, Gregory!" said his wife. "Who can

you leave your money to if not to your own son? You can't carry it away with you; and there would be a very poor consolation in making some stupid relation or other rich at Odo's expense."

"I could tie it up on his children, so that neither Odo nor his wife should touch a penny during their lifetime," said Lord Domaford, pompously. "My dear Virginia, you hardly realize the power that wealth gives its owner to influence the lives and destinies of others. Lady Magloire was speaking to me of this only the other day in the most earnest and sensible manner. She has good cause to know the value of money, poor woman, for I hear Magloire's affairs are in a very poor state—a very poor state indeed. Extraordinary that a public man who has occupied such a position as his, should have so little head for business as to allow himself to become involved as he has done."

Lady Grace was perfectly cognizant of the situation, and discussed it with much frankness when alone with her mamma.

"Of course it would be delightful, and besides, I happen to like Odo Copp very much," she said; "in fact, we've always been more or less pals since we used to meet at children's parties in London, though he's never attempted to make love to me; and I'm a couple of years older than he is if we come to facts."

"But you don't look it, my darling," said Lady Magloire, "and if you can only manage to like him sufficiently, that is the main thing. Your father would be pleased—that is, it would be a great relief to his mind—and Lord Domaford is really almost *too* eager for it. It is quite embarrassing. I only wish the young man himself were not *quite* such a bear. However, you will change all that."

"Oh, Odo's a good sort. I'm not afraid of *that*," said the astute Grace. "Now, Conrade Waldron, who's so much

better-looking, and so charming, and so heroic, is much more of a bear really. He is one of the domineering kind of men I thoroughly dislike. Spoilt by the adoration of middle-class females, I suppose. I should not care about tackling him. And besides, I rather dislike people cleverer than myself," she added, with perfect calm.

"But he is much better-mannered than young Copp."

"Do you think so? He seems to me such a typical A.D.C., always driving us all about in droves, like school-children at a beanfeast. However, I don't deny he is very amusing and good-looking. Only I dislike being looked down upon from a great height. To be sure he can't bear me; that may count for something."

"It is impossible to predict who girls will like nowadays," sighed Lady Magloire, who was as much attracted by Conrade's personality as she was repelled by his cousin's. "Odo's manner to you seemed to me so terribly offhand."

"Oh, we understand each other," said Lady Grace, calmly. "However, I must warn you, mamma, that I am not a bit certain I shall be able to pull it off. However, I'll do my best. I suppose it would be rather a big thing."

"Your father says so, and he always knows. And *you* know, darling, how much I hate having to discuss such matters with you at all. But we are so *very* badly off—and so many of you; and though, of course, I would not dream of asking you to marry any man you did not like, it would be a great thing to have you settled—and you are so good and helpful——"

Perhaps the occasion for Lady Magloire's tearful embrace of her daughter was not a very exalted one, but she was, nevertheless, sincere.

"There, there, mamma, don't be upset over it, for Heaven's sake," said Lady Grace, kissing her parent very

kindly. "After all, if Odo doesn't come up to the scratch, there are plenty of other men in the world. Of course I understand I must marry—for every one's sake, and, most of all, for my own."

"There is no one staying *here* whom I should think of for a moment, except Tommy Kerswell. Of course that would be all right; but you know they are just in the same plight as we are. He *must* marry money; at least, he ought to. Jane Alnoth is full of hopes about that little American girl. He seemed to take rather a fancy to her, and of course he came here on purpose to follow her up."

"I believe she will end by marrying her cousin, who is said to be even richer than she is," said Lady Grace, chuckling. "She is always raving about him, and I notice these delightful Yankee millionaires never want to marry us, though their sisters are always carrying off our brothers. It is really too provoking of them. However, I shall see Mr. Brett this afternoon, and who knows the result?" She spoke satirically, mocking at herself and her plans. "I declare this out-of-the-way valley is swarming with possibilities, and as full of gold as Sindbad's valley—what was it's name? I feel like Cæsar with new worlds to conquer in every direction; and I can but pray that I may presently be weeping like Alexander, because I have conquered them all."

"I only ask that you should be happy and well off, and settled where I could see you often and come and stay with you sometimes," said Lady Magloire, piteously. "It doesn't seem much to ask of Providence when I consider what the prospects of my children were when I married. I know I must seem worldly and scheming to talk about it; but what is one to do? I should only be thinking of it and praying for it, if I said nothing at all, and feeling like a hypocrite all the time."

"And I should see through you, mamma. It is far better to be frank when we are together. At three-and-twenty one isn't a child. What are we to do—as you say? I must marry, or I am a failure, that's the truth; in my position. I have no talents, and no enthusiasms, and no occupations except games, as a girl. But as a married woman I could make myself a power in the land, and help my husband to be anything he wished; that is if he had either money or position to start with. I haven't been brought up to know how to do anything without either. Odo has money, and position—of a kind—and we've known one another all our lives. It would do very well if——"

"At any rate, you have no rivals," said Lady Magloire.

But she had to withdraw this flattering unction from her soul when she beheld the bevy of maidens gathered together in the shade of the immense cedar on the lawn at Southerleigh.

It comforted her to perceive that none were so distinguished-looking as her daughter. But Kitty Trethewy was as tall, and far more beautiful; even Rosaleen and Zoe were prettier than Lady Grace, though they lacked her aristocratic and aquiline outline, and perhaps also the indefinable ease and simplicity of her manner in company; and though they had not attained the art of wearing pretty clothes with the same perfect unconsciousness.

Everybody was grouped about a little table covered with a white cloth, and laden with glittering silver and gilded objects.

"It is really too kind of Mr. Silas Brett. But I always say Americans are the kindest people on earth," said Charlotte, in her shrillest tones of triumph, as she exhibited these treasures to her guests. "Sending for prizes like these for the croquet and tennis tournaments."

"I am sure we must all thank him," said Mrs. James Luxton, whose four daughters excelled at tennis and croquet as at all other outdoor games then in vogue.

"Don't thank me, ma'am," said Mr. Silas Brett, in alarm. "It was no thought of mine. My daughter's idea." He waved his hand towards her. "I only carried it out, as I carry out all her wishes."

Zoe, looking very pretty in a demure and nunlike gown of dove-coloured grey, smiled engagingly at her parent.

"Papa always does what I tell him," she admitted. "I just ordered all the prettiest things I could find in the catalogue; and, anyway, they don't amount to much, for they're all modern. I thought the games would be more lively with a few prizes around. And I mean to win most of them myself, you'll see."

"You'll win them, dearie, fast enough, if you set your heart on it," said Mrs. Silas Brett, comfortably. "Zoe does whatever she's a mind to, and always has done. I was just like her as a girl. Whatever I wanted I got. If I couldn't get it myself, somebody else got it for me. Silas used to be on the hop for ever. But I always tell him I'm nowhere since Zoe was born. I'm downright forsaken since that day." She beamed approvingly on her husband and child as she sat, panting, in her green garden-chair.

Mrs. Silas might have resembled Zoe in her youth, but the onlookers would have been puzzled to trace any resemblance between them now. She was rather stout, with a large dark face and heavy features, whereas Zoe was the daintiest little fairy imaginable, slim and grey-eyed and delicately white.

"Everybody knows I look like the Bretts, and not a bit like you, mother," said the young lady, very cheerfully; "and as for winning the prizes, I was just making fun. I can't play games a bit, and that's a fact."

Mr. Silas Brett observed that the four daughters of Mrs. James Luxton, who were obviously much afraid of their parent, here exchanged glances of surprise, and he also perceived by Mrs. Luxton's expression that she was yet more shocked than her offspring by Miss Zoe's free and easy method of replying to her mother's fond address.

"You know what we say on the other side, ma'am," he said apologetically, but with a very decided twinkle in his grey eyes. "That American children bring up their parents very well as a rule, but that sometimes they err on the side of over-severity."

Mrs. Luxton relaxed her stiffness, and smiled amiably at Mr. Brett, feeling that his generosity in the matter of prizes deserved recognition; but she continued to look coldly upon Miss Zoe, alarmed at the possible effect of such an example upon her carefully drilled and silent progeny.

The games were certainly more lively, as Zoe predicted. Not a few of the players exhibited indeed an almost feverish anxiety to win such unusually handsome and solid trophies, and Charlotte's party owed not a little of its acknowledged success to the lavishness of Mr. Silas Brett, which distracted the attention of the younger members of the community from the ill-furnished *buffet*, and even partially consoled their elders.

A tennis tournament was inaugurated, and occupied the greater part of the afternoon.

Lots were drawn, Odo was assigned to Lady Grace Trumoin as a partner, and the pair carried all before them.

His father exchanged congratulatory glances with Lady Magloire. Fate appeared to be favouring their wishes.

In the last match the young couple were opposed by Conrade and Zoe.

Conrade had held his own by the simple expedient of requesting his tiny partner to keep well out of his way.

It was dull for Zoe, but though she pouted she submitted. She admired Conrade, who played so well, and looked so tall and handsome and active in his white flannels; but she wished him less masterful and more considerate.

Odo would have had no chance against his cousin had it not been for Lady Grace, who played tennis well, as she did everything well. Her tall and graceful figure presented a marked contrast to the thick-set, square-shouldered form of her partner; but Odo's steadiness made him a strong player.

Conrade was vanquished; and vexed, though he did not show it.

"I'm vurry, *vurry* sorry," said little Zoe, looking up with pretty apology into the handsome olive face, somewhat pale with over-exertion.

"Oh, you couldn't help it. She plays uncommonly well, that girl. I couldn't have beaten her single-handed; so with Odo to back her, of course they were miles too strong for us," said Conrade, with gracious mendacity.

The prizes were handed to the victors by Charlotte, who made inappropriate but well-meant remarks as she presented them.

Charlotte was in the happiest state of flutter and excitement.

Resplendent in a pink muslin, with a bright green sash tied round her somewhat solid waist, and a hat to match pinned on one side of an elaborate erection of fair hair, she felt herself every inch a châtelaine. She was sufficiently nice-looking to be described as a pretty girl, and she was just now beaming with good-humour and satisfaction. She was so determined to be a model hostess that she patronized everybody—from the chapel-going Hortopps, towards whom she had suddenly relented,—to the astonished Lord

Domaford, who was making a tour of the grounds in order to say a kind word to each of the guests in turn.

Lord Domaford was not altogether certain that he was enjoying himself at Charlotte's party.

His own importance seemed to be somewhat at a discount, in the presence of those perfectly calm and unassuming Americans, Mr. Silas Q. Brett and his silent nephew.

Persons who were usually fluttered by the great man's notice, now bore his inquiries after their health and their well-being with comparative equanimity, and even plied him with questions in return. Were these *the* Bretts? Was that quiet young man really the son of the great John Brett, the multi-millionaire?

Lord Domaford was irritated by the continual recurrence of these questions.

There was quite a little crowd round Mrs. Silas Q. Brett, who, nothing loth, amused ten or fifteen listeners as cheerfully as she would have amused one, and recounted her personal adventures, tastes, and opinions, with a frankness that astounded her listeners.

Mr. Silas Brett was observed to listen to his wife with a kind of dry good-humour; it was evidently a point of honour with him never to contradict or correct her assertions. That she was given, occasionally, to boasting, and more than occasionally to exaggerate facts, could not be denied; but on the other hand, neither could it be denied that she was amusing.

Garden parties are apt to be dull, especially to older people who have no young ones belonging to them, and who do not care for games; but it was impossible to be dull in the company of Mrs. Silas Q. Brett. Impossible to resent her wildest mis-statements, or to resist her inveterate good-nature. The laughter in her vicinity was so incessant that it surprised even herself.

Lord Domaford, though gifted with a subtle and exquisite appreciation of his own humour, was invariably bored by other people's wit, and he was therefore not amused by the fragments which reached his ears of Mrs. Brett's conversation.

He looked with indignation upon the table laden with silver-gilt cups and cigarette-cases and rose-bowls.

No such prizes were ever offered at Monksbere; for Lord Domaford had no idea of throwing away money, and Lady Domaford considered that the honour of being invited at all to her parties, must be in itself sufficient distraction for her guests.

How very ostentatious and unnecessary was this display! Yet it was hard to accuse Silas Brett of ostentation. He was dressed in an old-fashioned holland suit—somewhat resembling the Vicomte's summer array; and a white hat; and he wore no jewellery, not so much as a diamond pin or a signet ring, and Lord Domaford was guilty of both these adornments. He made no pretence to fashion; called all the men who spoke to him "sir," and all the elder ladies "ma'am"; and his voice was low and pleasant and refined as his nephew's voice. Silas was taller and browner and leaner than Iron Brett, and some thirty years his senior; consequently he was more easily amused, and smiled more readily as he strolled about with the Vicomte and watched the young folk at play.

"Do rest, my darling, you look so hot and tired," said Lady Magloire to her daughter, who carried the trophy she had just received to the grassy knoll under the elms, where her mother was conversing with Iron Brett.

"I am hot and thirsty and tired," said Lady Grace, "but as I won, that does not signify." She threw herself into a chair, and looked round for her late partner; but he

was walking away in the direction of the house, beside a tiny figure in grey, and it was Conrade who brought her the refreshment of which she stood in need.

"Hobnobbing with the enemy," said Lady Grace, laughing. "You were heavily handicapped, Mr. Waldron. Has Miss Brett ever played before, should you suppose?"

"Never, I should fancy," said Conrade, smiling. "Odo was certainly in luck. I hope another time fate will grant you to me as a partner, for you are certainly too formidable as an enemy."

Oddly enough, Odo was uttering a somewhat similar aspiration to Miss Brett.

"Oh yes, Lady Grace plays very well. But I must say I like to take a ball now and then, and she seldom gave me a chance," he remarked, very unjustly. "I hope you'll be my partner another time."

"Why, I've not played a dozen times."

"Well, you didn't get much practice this time. It struck me that you and I might as well have gone for a stroll, and left them to fight it out alone."

"You don't do yourself justice," said Miss Zoe, demurely. "My, I *was* frightened! I didn't dare even try. I knew I'd hear him shout 'Leave it to me,' and have to hide myself behind the nearest daisy all the time. He's just grand, but I don't care about tennis any more if it's like that. I shall never play like you."

"*I* shouldn't have had a chance against Conrade, if it hadn't been for Lady Grace; I never have. He beats me in everything," said Odo, simply.

"Not in modesty, I guess," said Zoe, and her demure face dimpled. "I've often noticed you don't think very much of yourself."

"There's not much reason why I should," said Odo,

gruffly. "Don't you know I've failed in about everything I've tried to do? Went up twice for the Army and couldn't get through."

"Well, I wouldn't worry about that; you're in the other concern, aren't you?"

"The Yeomanry; yes, I'm in the Yeomanry."

"Well, that's enough," said Zoe, with decision. "You'd have to fight if any one were to invade your country. I don't see what you want to play soldier for all the time. I guess you'd fight as well as most people if you got a chance. And I don't see the good of worrying, anyway."

Odo looked down upon her with deep admiration.

"Do you never worry?"

"Never," she said, without hesitation. "I know what I have a mind to do, and I do it when I can. When I can't I do something else."

"What would you do instead of soldiering if you were me?"

"Why, if I couldn't please myself, I'd make up my mind to please somebody else," she said, dimpling again. "I don't see what's to hinder you from going into Parliament, as your father wishes."

"I couldn't make a speech to save my life," said Odo. "You'll be at my coming of age, and hear me try. How I hate the whole thing. I know beforehand exactly what everybody will say, and I hate flummery and humbug."

"I don't see what you want to make speeches for if you do go into Parliament," said Zoe, in her sensible and matter-of-fact manner. "If you vote the right way, you'll do some good to your country, I suppose; and if you're a bad speaker, you'd best not waste your own time and other people's trying to orate. But I don't see why an honest man need talk humbug, and I don't believe any one wants him to."

Odo was silent. He longed very much to confide in his little mentor, but there are things that cannot be said. He could not speak to her of his parents, nor of their want of sympathy with him, and his own want of respect for their methods and their characters.

Odo was perpetually discontented because he was out of tune with his surroundings; and Zoe, who had quick perceptions, understood his silence, and respected him for it. She had also seen something, and heard more, of his parents, and perceived how antagonistic to both must be the blundering single-minded honesty of their son.

"I guess we all have to make-allowances, you know," she said frankly.

She glanced towards the summer-house, where her mother was sitting at a little table, refreshing herself with weak lemonade, fanning herself with her handkerchief, and talking—talking incessantly, in a high-pitched penetrating voice.

"Mother's always just so. She will talk to strangers all the time, and father and I can't stop her if we tried ever so much," said Zoe, placidly. "She's telling them all how she ran away from boarding-school to get married at sixteen. It's a very amusing story."

This information was unnecessary, for Odo could hear very distinctly for himself what Mrs. Silas Brett was telling her audience; but he liked Zoe's pluck and her defence of her mother, as she had liked his reticence on the subject of his own troubles.

"I have often thought," he said, speaking quickly to cover his own confusion, "that a runaway marriage would save a lot of trouble and embarrassment and rows and asking people's consent. The good old days of Gretna Green must have been splendid. You jumped into a postchaise and there you were. But I suppose no girl nowadays

would consent to that sort of thing. They like all the fuss, and the dressing up, and having hundreds of people to stare at one."

"I don't know. *I* shouldn't care," said Zoe, and she dimpled more than ever. "I think the other way would be real romantic."

"But your people wouldn't think so," said Odo, gruffly.

"Well—I don't see what *they* could say," said Miss Zoe, in a most uncompromising tone; "for they did it themselves."

Mr. Iron Brett brought some tea to refresh Lady Magloire and her daughter, and remained with them as long as politeness required, whilst they drank it.

But by some perversity Lady Grace found herself inclined to bestow most of her smiles on Conrade. Since she was convinced that he disliked her, she felt it due to herself to try and overcome that dislike, and during the process she became more interested in the young soldier than her mamma thought altogether desirable. Lady Magloire hoped it was pique which made Mr. Brett presently stroll off in an opposite direction.

He turned through a green archway and a little painted gate, and found himself in a wilder part of the grounds, where a pathway ran along the sunny, red-walled, herbaceous border, to a small arbour in the distance.

As he drew closer to this he caught a glimpse of a white gown and a shady hat, with red poppies above raven hair.

Mr. Brett smiled to himself, and Rosaleen started as he uttered her name.

"Oh, Mr. Brett, has any one missed me? Did you come to look for me?" she asked ingenuously. "The sun was very hot, and I played tennis so hard that I was tired; so I thought I'd slip away here, where I used

to sit when I was a little girl, and rest myself." Her lip quivered.

He noticed traces of tears on her long black lashes, and her brown cheeks were deeply flushed.

"I came partly to look for you, and partly because I wanted to get away on my own account," he confessed. "The fact is, I had rather a bad headache, and I've been shirking the games in consequence."

"I'm so sorry. You look pale. Even paler than usual," said Rosaleen, anxiously. "Will you come home to Honeycott and have some sal volatile and rest there? We could go the short cut by the kitchen garden without meeting anybody. It was very kind of you to think of me at all when you weren't feeling well."

"If you felt as right as I do now, there wouldn't be much the matter with you," he said gently and gallantly. "I'll rest here, unless you'd rather be alone."

"No, indeed, it's very melancholy to be alone," said Rosaleen, smiling.

"Then you'll forgive me for wondering why you came right away here by yourself?"

"I'm afraid you will laugh at me if I tell you why," she said, colouring yet more deeply.

"I should feel pretty mean if I asked you to tell me something and then laughed at you," said Mr. Brett, reproachfully.

She was too young to be reserved with so sympathetic a listener.

"It was my favourite hiding-place when I was a little girl. I used to come here when I wanted to be alone, and to dream dreams; and it was here I used to plan," she said hurriedly, "to do something great when I was grown up. Something I meant to devote my whole life to. It—was a —a kind of sacred place to me."

"I understand," said the American. His manner was so gentle and respectful that she gathered courage to proceed.

"I expect I got into the habit of coming here to think to myself," she said wistfully, "because there was no one to talk to about it. *Bon papa* would have listened, but he was so wise that, of course, he would have thought me foolish."

Mr. Brett smiled a little queerly to himself at this.

"Of course there was Odo; he has always been my chum, and we have always told each other things, but you know what boys are," said Rosaleen, apologetically. "If a girl happens to mention anything they don't understand, they are sure to say 'a little knowledge is a dangerous thing,' or something of that kind."

"I call that a grudging spirit," said Mr. Brett.

"Of course there is Kitty. She is always sweet, and never laughs at me," said Rosaleen; "but it's no use pretending she's interested, because she isn't, and never was, in the kind of things I like. To begin with, she never reads a book; and secondly, she says thinking makes her melancholy, so she never means to think as long as she lives."

"Well, that is one way out of the difficulty," said Mr. Brett, and he laughed. "Miss Kitty appears to know her own mind."

"She always did. She settled everything that was to happen to her when she was quite little; even down to what her children's names would be when she was grown up and married. That is the best of Kitty; one knows exactly what to expect of her. What she plans she carries out, so she is always bright and contented. But I have rather lost hope lately," said Rosaleen, dismally.

"That's bad. We can afford to lose most of the contents of Pandora's box, but not that."

"Kitty *meant* to enjoy herself and nothing else, when she went to London."

"And didn't you mean to enjoy yourself?"

"If I tell you, you will think me very silly," said Rosaleen, humbly; "but I will tell you if you like. I came here just before we went to London, to remind myself to be as true to my vow there as I had tried to be here."

"Haven't you been true to it?" he asked gently.

"No. I was carried away by other things. Not so much by the dressing and dancing and meeting pleasant people, but by the music and pictures and theatres; and most of all the statues, as you know. I felt I cared for nothing in the world so much as the hope of becoming an artist one day. The difficulties down here seem greater than they did in the studio"—she wiped away a tear—"but still, I could go on working and dreaming even down here, for ever, without troubling about my great idea any more. The fact is, London is so big, and the people in it seem so busy or so great or so clever, that one realizes one's own insignificance, and grows ashamed of one's dreams; and ideas which I thought noble and sublime when I was alone, seemed—ridiculous—there."

"That may account for the fact that most great ideas have been evolved in solitude," said Mr. Brett. "Thoughts are thickest where folk are scarcest."

"I was so foolish as to hope my idea was original," she sighed, with a tardy reminiscence of Odo's warning, "though it was so simple."

"An idea has only to be sufficiently simple, and not one person in a thousand will believe it to be original," said Mr. Brett, impartially. "They just say, 'why, that's what all of us were thinking; it's only a chance you happened to say it out loud.' People all jog along some old beaten track, and wish it wasn't so far round; and then there

comes a little voice out of the silence and tells them of a short cut; and the whole world hears, and changes its course accordingly."

Then Rosaleen, breathless with earnestness, revealed her dream of a Universal Brotherhood to the tired millionaire with a headache, and he listened with tender indulgence, and even reverence, to the soft voice of the little maiden who wanted to reform the world.

She forgot her surroundings, and was deaf to the cries of the tennis-players and the laughter that floated to them over the green archway and the yew hedges from the merry-makers in the garden. She saw only the quiet attentive face of the American, and the bright grey eyes which told her that he was kind, and understood, and was not inclined to laugh.

"I was only a little girl when I thought of it first, and I have read, and read, and read, and I can't find anything *exactly* like it," she said. "It seemed to me it would be unlike all other brotherhoods, because there would be nothing secret and nothing supernatural. And it made me not mind nearly so much about being called a prig, because I knew that every one who thought they had a message to deliver always tried to be perfect. It seemed to me one could acquire virtue as easily as accomplishments if one gave one's whole mind to it. But now, of course, I know," said Rosaleen, mournfully, "that if I waited to be perfect I might wait to be old, and die without delivering my message."

He nodded gravely.

"I believe you are right. And I don't believe you'll ever come much nearer perfection than you are at this moment," he said ambiguously. "But, Miss Rosaleen, I don't believe in putting things off. If you don't make haste, I shouldn't wonder if somebody didn't forestall you."

"Oh, Mr. Brett," said Rosaleen, turning reproachful eyes of wonder upon him. "Do you think I mind that? What does it matter if the little voice you spoke of is mine or another's, so long as the thing itself was accomplished, and good men of all faiths and all nations took hands?"

"How would you decide which were the good men?"

"I mean men on the *side* of good," said Rosaleen, anxiously. "There could be vows—very, very simple ones, in which no fear of controversy could arise. To speak the truth, to work faithfully, to live temperately, and to wrong no living creature; to be brave and modest and gentle. All the members of the brotherhood could take the same solemn vow to order their lives by these rules, which would be a bond in common. Think, when injustice or oppression was being suffered anywhere, of the representatives of the Brotherhood in each country meeting and declaring it should not be, and the Brotherhood all over the world supporting them. There would be no need of war."

"It seems to me your scheme would lead to pretty considerable happenings," said Mr. Brett, and he smiled. "It's not much wonder you look sober, with all this in your little head."

"I don't mind your laughing at me—a little—now you have listened so kindly. I know I'm young, and very likely silly," said Rosaleen, hoping he would contradict her.

Mr. Brett did not contradict her, but he smiled at her again very indulgently, almost tenderly.

"In America we are all for encouraging young folk to have their say," he remarked. "If their ideas weren't a trifle large to start with, they'd very likely have none left at all by the time the passing of years had done whittling them down."

"And when one is young," said Rosaleen, "*bon papa* says one can only see one side of a question."

"When you're impartial enough to see both sides of a question," said Mr. Brett, dryly, "you'll not be very likely to convince anybody else of either."

"Do you think I shall ever be able to convince anybody?" she asked wistfully.

"Why, I believe you've convinced me already," said Mr. Brett, promptly. "So much so that I was about to propose —two heads being better than one—that you should take me into partnership over this matter."

"Do you really mean it?"

"I do," said Mr. Brett, not moving a muscle of his face. "Maybe we'll have to go into a few more details before we finally fix it up. But as I'm staying on here for quite a while—if you'll have me—there'll be plenty of time for that. And perhaps we'd best not take any one else into our confidence just yet, but talk it over quietly together till we're of one mind on all points."

He looked at her for a moment, observing critically the grave and innocent expression of her dark eyes and serious mouth. Though her face was intelligent and sweet, it was also the face of a dreamer, almost of a child.

There was no trace of consciousness in the grateful direct gaze with which the beautiful hazel eyes met his searching look.

"I should like that better than anything in the world," said Rosaleen, earnestly.

"Then it's a bargain," said the American, quietly. "Will you give me your hand on it, Miss Rosaleen?"

She put her gloved fingers into his hand confidingly.

"When you were a little girl, the first time I ever saw you," he said, "you allowed me to kiss your hand."

"I remember," said Rosaleen, and smiled back at him.

Mr. Brett stooped his head and touched the back of the little grey glove with his lips.

When he looked up he saw that her face was crimson, and that her eyes no longer met his own.

Then the American knew that all in a moment he had waked Rosaleen from the dreams of her long childhood.

Kitty, tall, fair, and joyous, appeared at the opening of the arbour with a jealous cavalier on either hand.

"What are you talking about so earnestly, you two?" she cried. "*Bon papa* sent me to look for you, Rosaleen. He says it is time to go home. Hasn't it been a delightful party?"

CHAPTER XVIII

LORD DOMAFORD was inspired by Charlotte's garden-party with an idea which he was not slow to communicate to his wife.

"I think, Virginia, it would be a very good plan if Conrade were to marry our little neighbour, Miss Fish."

Lord Domaford presumably called Charlotte his little neighbour, because her position in the world was less important, and her income much smaller, than his own; for in actual stature she had considerably the advantage of him.

"You think of nothing but matchmaking just now, Gregory," said his wife, as peevishly as usual. "What can it matter to us who Conrade marries? Besides, he would be very foolish to marry at all, when he has nothing to marry on; and no prospects, as you are always reminding me."

"Well, my dear, that is just it. A wife with a little money is exactly what he needs."

"Mrs. Trethewy tells me they find Southerleigh Court a very expensive place to keep up," said Lady Domaford. "And if they find that now, how can she afford to keep an extravagant husband, and very likely a number of children into the bargain?"

"I never suggested they should attempt to keep up Southerleigh Court, my love," said her husband, patiently. "On the contrary, I do not see how they can live there at

all. Conrade is getting on very nicely in his profession, and of course he would not give it up. She would go out to India with him. In fact, I should counsel her to sell the place altogether. James Luxton gave me a hint that she appeared somewhat inclined to do so, and I let him understand that I should be glad to take it off her hands at a reasonable price at any time. I suppose I can afford to give a better price than most people. If she married a man without money, of course she would sell sooner or later."

Then Lady Domaford, who was slow-witted, began to understand.

Southerleigh had long been Lord Domaford's Naboth's vineyard. His property had extended its boundaries on three sides, but it was barred on the fourth by those red rolling acres of rich arable, those well-watered emerald meadows, and those sunny fruitful orchards, which formed the Southerleigh estate.

"The Court is nothing, of course, of a residence in itself; but with improvements and additions it would make a suitable home for Odo, if he marries, as I hope he may; and—and a very tolerable Dower-house," said Lord Domaford, looking at his wife to see how she liked the idea.

The more he thought of this scheme, the more he fell in love with it.

It contained the double advantage he was so fond of pursuing. It would benefit Conrade, and include the gratification of a long-cherished desire of his own.

Lady Domaford did not dislike the notion, and her enthusiasm seldom progressed beyond this negative stage; so that her husband felt justified in seeking his nephew without delay.

"I am treating you as a man of the world, Conrade,

and speaking frankly and bluntly of a delicate subject," he said, when he had made the suggestion as cautiously as possible, "because I have always found you singularly amenable to reason, unlike poor Odo. You know it would be quite enough for me to mention any such wish to Odo, to make him determine at once to go off in the opposite direction. I have no fears of this kind in your case."

He thought the comparison such a flattering one that Conrade must inevitably be pleased with it.

"I believe it would, sir," said Conrade; and his face was inscrutable. "Most men like to consult their own feelings in these matters."

"Quite so, quite so; but their interests as well as their feelings may be consulted; and there is no harm, I hope, in pointing out in which direction such interests lie," said Lord Domaford, almost deferentially, for he was growing increasingly anxious to convince Conrade.

"I am fond of my profession, uncle, and I am not particularly anxious to settle down," said Conrade, gloomily.

"And I would by no means counsel your settling down," said Lord Domaford, warmly. "It is all very well for a young man in Odo's position to settle down; he has prospects which warrant his doing so; but I do not think that an idle life in a country house would suit you at all after your Indian experiences. I understand Miss Fish is free to dispose of the property, which, after all, she only inherited by what I cannot but consider a strange perversion of justice. George Trethewy, poor fellow, was not a man to be trusted, either in morals or in judgment, I am afraid. I was talking to James Luxton only yesterday. He thinks it very probable that she may grow tired of it, between ourselves; and its sale would make a very pleasant addition to her already ample income. In that case you would be better off with a wife in India than without one.

And her ideas cannot be large in proportion to her means. She must be aware that she is a nobody. She would surely be glad to accept any one who has a good name to offer her, superior family connections, and—and without any desire to flatter you, Conrade, I think I may safely add, great personal advantages."

Conrade was not flattered. Like his aunt, he now perceived the drift of Lord Domaford's meaning. But he maintained a perfect calm of manner, though his resentment was none the less bitter for being concealed.

He understood that Charlotte was considered a suitable wife for him because, in spite of her money, she was a nobody, who would probably be glad to marry any poor young man of good family; and that Lord Domaford had conceived this plan of providing for his nephew's future at no expense to himself, in hopes that thereby Odo's inheritance would be the richer for the coveted acres of Southerleigh.

Lord Domaford, resting complacently in the revolving-chair before his writing-table, with a bland smile upon his broad face, had no idea that Conrade was not listening with interest and respect to the string of arguments he now gently unrolled for his consideration.

Conrade leant against one of the polished light oak pillars of the library, and looked down from his great height upon the short and sturdy figure of his uncle. His thin patrician features, fine dark eyes, and straight black brows, were doubly handsome in contrast to Lord Domaford's homely aspect and snub nose. Though his pose was languid to affectation, he was very obviously of muscular and powerful build, with a brow and glance that expressed an intellect beyond the average.

"I quite follow all you say, sir," he observed with polite satire, when Lord Domaford's flow of eloquence was

exhausted, which was not for some time. "But since it appears that, in seeking a wife, my object is to be not so much a comfortable home as a large salary, I am surprised that you should select Miss Fish in particular. There are plenty of other young ladies—unhampered by the possession of an estate, which, as you justly observe, a poor infantry soldier, stationed in India, is not in a position to enjoy—and whose means are infinitely larger. Take, for instance, the pretty young lady we met yesterday, Miss Zoe Brett."

Lord Domaford hummed and hawed, debating within himself what he should reply. He wished Conrade to be independent of his help, but he scarcely wished him to be so independent as the sharer of Miss Brett's reputed millions must necessarily become. He was hardly conscious, it is true, of the existence of this sentiment, but nevertheless it very strongly influenced his reply.

"My dear Conrade," he said presently, "there is, to my mind, something very unsatisfactory about these American heiresses. They seem to spring up like—like mushrooms in the night. We do not know where they came from or how they got there. It is very difficult to ascertain what they have and what they have not. Mr. Silas Brett is admittedly a speculator in mines. He may be rich to-day and ruined to-morrow, and then where would you be? You might wake up one fine morning to find yourself tied for life to a little American girl without a halfpenny. You can't get away from *that*," ended Lord Domaford, triumphantly.

"Some people wouldn't want to," suggested Conrade, with a sardonic smile, "if she were only half as charming as little Miss Zoe."

"Besides, I couldn't—I could *not*," said Lord Domaford, with a solemnity he mistook for earnest sincerity, "counsel you to marry entirely for money. I have a

respect for Miss Fish. We have known her since her childhood. She is a worthy young woman in every sense, and extremely attractive, to my mind, in appearance. In short, she looks like a nice typical English girl, which is more than you can say for Miss Brett. You must surely agree with me."

"Entirely," said Conrade, gravely. "Miss Brett certainly does not look like a typical English girl; and I believe that when you have described Miss Fish as a worthy young woman, you have, so to speak, summed her up in a word."

But Lord Domaford was too much engrossed with the planning of his next sentence to have much attention to spare for Conrade's replies.

"We know, besides, exactly what Miss Fish has, and what she has *not*," he said; and this time he was really in earnest. "And as regards the other young lady, there is another private, but serious reason, why I should not like to encourage you to pay her attention."

"You mean the Duchess intends her for Tommy," said Conrade, sarcastically.

"It is essential that your cousin Kerswell should marry a woman with money."

"And if *he* wakes up one fine morning and find himself tied, etc.?"

Lord Domaford rose impatiently.

"Of course the Duke would make sure. It is a very different thing. You have nothing to offer, and he has a great deal. He would be justified in asking for enormous settlements before consenting. I hope you will think over what I have said, Conrade. Your prospects are not good; and you must remember that I shall presently have to face the necessity for settling Odo. He will require a separate establishment when he marries, and with so much depending

upon him, he cannot marry too soon. I should be very glad to think you had provided for yourself by making a sensible match."

He left the room, rather displeased than otherwise with Conrade's indifference to the interest in his fate displayed by his benevolent uncle. Conrade often displeased Lord Domaford. Though he was civil and attentive, he was never deferential, often haughty, and always completely self-possessed.

Conrade confided some portion of this conversation to Kitty, to whom he confided most things by this time, finding her sympathy and her companionship more and more necessary to his loneliness of spirit.

Nobody knew how many meetings took place between these two, in a certain retired corner of the Monksbere wood, far removed from the Domaford main road, which threaded its outskirts.

They met in the hollows, by a narrow stream, where an ancient yew spread its shelter above a fallen log, which was Kitty's favourite seat. From the cool moss-grown banks of the little river sprang green ferns and hartstongue above the glistening leaves of the ground ivy. On the high opposite bank, where the sunshine fell, the mountain ash and the bird-cherry grew, and the honeysuckle embraced the hazel. But Kitty and Conrade sat in the perpetual twilight beneath the yew, and listened to each other's talk, and to the ceaseless rush of the brown water over the stones.

They were old playmates, and there could be no harm in meeting Conrade thus, Kitty argued to herself. *Bon papa* could not mind, even if he knew.

Meantime *bon papa* did not know, and Kitty's wanderings remained unquestioned as ever, for Rosaleen's mornings

were devoted to her studio, where she was distractedly endeavouring to reproduce in clay the physiognomy of Iron Brett.

"I have 'nothing to offer!' I suppose Uncle Gregory really believes men and women measure each other entirely by the length of their purses?" he said bitterly.

"How can you mind what he says?" said Kitty, in fiery partisanship. "Nothing to offer! He judges everybody by himself. He has nothing to offer but his brand-new title and his bank-book. But *you*—that are a man and a soldier, with a heart and brains and—and——" She faltered. How could Kitty tell Conrade to his face that she beheld in him an Adonis; the veritable realization in flesh and blood of a young girl's dream hero; accomplished, manly, handsome, and undoubtedly possessed of a somewhat overbearing and dictatorial disposition.

"It is true that I have nothing to offer," said Conrade, gloomily.

"You have yourself," said Kitty, softly; and she looked away. There was a short silence, and then she said with a nervous laugh, "How funny it would be if you really married Charlotte, and became the owner of Southerleigh."

"If I *did*," said Conrade, with set teeth, "I would make her tie up every acre of the estate in such a manner that neither she nor her descendants could ever sell an inch of the ground. He wouldn't get much nearer his cherished plan of spreading Monksbere all over the Cullaway hills, and buying up all the land between Remberton and Domaford. And I would chuck the Army, and stand for Parliament on the other side, and fight Odo whenever they did succeed in persuading him to go in for it. The present man is only a stop-gap until that happy day, as every one knows."

"How amusing that would be," said Kitty; but her blue eyes were clouded and her sweet face was pale.

"I'm talking nonsense, of course," said Conrade, roughly. "Whatever he may be like, I'm under confounded obligations to him; and though he may be the most vulgar little, toadying, self-sufficient snob that ever walked the earth—until I've paid him off every farthing he's ever spent on me, I've no right to say so—not even to you, Kitty."

The last words were very sweet to Kitty. She turned her cherub face towards him once more, and her pretty smile was not much less radiant than usual.

"But it is quite safe with me, and you know I think exactly the same," she said calmly. "I wouldn't go to Monksbere at all if it wasn't for Odo, for Lady Domaford isn't a bit glad to see us now. I think she is afraid Odo might fall in love with one of us; and they are dying for him to marry Lady Grace Trumoin."

"That's very obvious," said Conrade. "Odo is quite aware of it, and so is Lady Grace. He says she's awfully jolly about it. They laugh over it like anything when they're together, and play up before the old people, so that his lordship believes all is going on swimmingly."

"Artful cat!" thought Kitty to herself, for she did not like Lady Grace, but aloud she merely remarked, "Old people are so foolish, to go planning things like that. Of course one sees through them. It is much nicer when they are like dear old Silas, whose one idea is to make sure that Zoe should be happy while she is young and able to enjoy herself."

"That's all very well, but he goes to the other extreme. No girl should be allowed to have her own way to that extent," said the lord of creation.

"I don't see why, so long as she is as sensible as Zoe," said Kitty, demurring. "As women grow older I grant you they *do* want looking after. They seem to me to grow sillier. Look at Zoe's mother."

Conrade laughed.

"Zoe's mother is not a type of her sex, I hope; and Zoe does not take after her in the very least. By-the-by, how long are they going to stay at Southerleigh?"

"Till what Mr. Brett calls the *fall*."

"Rather a long visit."

"They aren't going to stay all the time, only make it their headquarters. Besides, Charlotte weeps if Zoe talks of going. She adores Zoe now, just as she did Rosaleen and me at first. Zoe and I hardly dare speak to each other. But we mean to make up for it later, when we shall be together."

"Where?" said Conrade, rather sharply.

He knew very well, and Kitty knew that he knew; but she had hitherto not mentioned the subject to him of her proposed visit to Alnoth.

"I waited till it was quite decided before telling you. But grandpapa is willing, and the Duchess wrote very kindly. And—and—there seems no reason why I should *not* go," Kitty said, with a little catch in her breath that nearly resembled a sob, though she smiled bravely all the time.

Conrade switched the nettles savagely with his stick.

"None whatever," he said angrily. "None whatever—that I can see."

A short pause.

"Perhaps you will be there," suggested Kitty, meekly. "Tommy says that——"

"I wish you would not call him by that ridiculous nickname."

"But everybody calls him so."

"That is no reason why you should. It argues a degree of intimacy that might lead a stranger to fancy—and, besides, his name is Kerswell."

"It would suggest a much greater degree of intimacy if I called him Kerswell; for he says nobody does that but his father and mother," retorted Kitty, with spirit. "I really couldn't do it. I will call him Lord Kerswell, if you wish. Of course I *do*—to most people."

"I suppose it is *his* doing, this invitation?"

"I do not see why you should suppose so. The old Duke was particularly kind to me when he showed me his pictures and things in London. He said that, as I took so much interest in that kind of thing, he would like to show me the rest of the collection at Alnoth."

Even Conrade could not help laughing.

"Kitty, you are——"

"*Impayable*," she suggested. "That is what grandpapa always says."

"You are anything you like," said Conrade. "Do you know we must be starting? Look at the time." He held out his watch for her inspection.

"Time slips away rather quickly in this shady retreat," said Kitty, accepting his help to rise from the log on which she had been seated.

"It slips away very fast everywhere," said Conrade. "I shall be sailing again for India before I can look round, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless a miracle happens—or—or I make up my mind to take Uncle Gregory's disinterested advice," he said grimly.

Kitty looked straight before her and said nothing; and they walked back to Honeycott together, and parted in the lane, outside the green door, almost in silence.

In the garden sat the Vicomte, feeding his pet toad, who found a safe shelter during the summer months under the violas. He greeted Kitty with a smile.

"Where hast thou been, truant?"

"In the woods, *bon papa*."

"I have had a visitor," said the Vicomte.

"Yes, *bon papa*," she said listlessly.

He became more serious; he came to her, and took her slender fingers fondly into his large, shaking hands.

"Thou art asked in marriage, my little one," said the Vicomte, solemnly. "And by one who is, it appears, worthy of thy regard."

She opened astonished blue eyes.

"Yes," said the Vicomte, sentimentally. "This so estimable and confiding young man approaches me with humility, with the diffidence of youth, and of a lover, and asks my permission to address you."

"How dared he?" said Kitty. Her cheeks flushed, and her eyes sparkled.

Old Patrick regarded her with dismay, and dropped his pomposity, which was not natural to him, but which had seemed to befit the occasion.

"What would you?" he asked, surprised. "If he loves you—if he desires to wed you, is he to hide this from me, your grandfather, who thinks only of your happiness from morning till night? Wouldst thou then have thy secrets from me, little one?"

He was inclined to weep, and Kitty hastened to soothe him.

"Oh, *bon papa*, you know I have no secrets," she said, though her conscience pricked her at the words. "I hope you told him I would have nothing to do with him."

"It is not thus that I reply to the heir of a noble house, who proposes to me an honourable alliance for my child," said the Vicomte, with dignity.

"A noble house!" said Kitty. Her face changed. "*Who* was it, *bon papa*?"

"Is it possible that thou didst not remark his attentions at Southerleigh, which did not, however, escape my observations?" said the Vicomte, reproachfully.

"Oh, grandpapa, gentlemen are always very attentive; that means nothing. It might be anybody," said Kitty, impatiently.

"It is Lord Kerswell of whom I speak."

"Oh!" said Kitty, in tones of relief.

Young Percy Hortopp had made himself conspicuous by his devotion to her at Charlotte's garden-party, and Kitty had feared to hear that he had actually taken the step of asking her grandfather's permission to propose to her. Kitty had begun to dislike Mr. Percy Hortopp, even to dread him. He was not a gentleman; he dropped unpleasant hints of a prior claim to her regard, and she reproached herself furiously for that foolish passing fancy, which had, nevertheless, once existed, and to which he had presumed to refer.

Kitty was not less attractive in Mr. Percy Hortopp's eyes because he observed men of greater importance than himself competing for her smiles.

If it were only Tommy, she was safe indeed. Dear, solemn, fat, honourable little Tommy. How funny, and how like him, to go to her grandfather.

"Though I like him much," said the Vicomte, "I would not force thy inclinations, my little one. It is, besides, proper, as I told him, that he should first seek the consent of his own parents. This, it appears, in the ardour of his affection for thee, he has altogether omitted to do. He assures me of the English custom for a son to ignore the claim of his parents upon these occasions. But I stand firm." The Vicomte waved his hand. "I give him permission certainly to offer his attentions, for I have no reason to suppose thou wouldst not be welcome to those

who have already manifested for thee a liking so extraordinary, and yet so natural. But my consent I give never, until theirs is obtained. Believe me, this young man is good, he is honest, he is brave," said the Vicomte, whose warm heart had been completely won by Lord Kerswell's courtesy, modesty, and impassioned avowal of his love for Kitty. "I who speak to you am never deceived in the honesty of a fellow-creature."

"I don't want to marry anybody, *bon papa*," said Kitty; and the tears gathered in her blue eyes. "I know Tommy is very nice, and I'm very fond of him indeed. But not—not in that way."

Then she went into the house, and old Patrick looked after her with a smile.

"Aha—she likes him well already. The rest will come," he said to himself. "And this excellent, this disinterested young man who spoke to me, with a frankness so adorable, of his poverty in proportion to the greatness of his rank, shall have a surprise of the most enchanting, when he learns the amount of the *dot* that I shall bestow upon my little one."

CHAPTER XIX

A BRILLIANT sunshine, with a hint of coming autumn in the early morning air.

The ripening peaches glowed on the sunny walls beneath the thatch; the old standards were weighed down with brown pears, too hard yet for gathering; the robin sang loudly from the fig tree in the corner.

The Vicomte, in his brown holland coat, smoked his after-breakfast cigarette, in company with his friend, and paused to smile at a young wisteria which he had transplanted in full leaf on the previous evening.

He looked at Iron Brett triumphantly.

"You see how I have deceived him! Regard me that! Not a leaf droops. I take him up with a large plot of earth. I remove to a situation where he will certainly be happier. I water him well, and he is actually unaware that he has made a voyage." He put his finger on his nose and laughed like a child at the notion of the wisteria's imaginary surprise. "This morning he does not know where he is. He wakes in a new place." He grew philosophical. "Thus, doubtless, it will be one day with ourselves."

"If we fret as little over our uprooting as that plant, and find ourselves as much the gainers by the exchange," said Mr. Brett, smiling, "I believe we shall have nothing to complain about."

One cloudless summer day after another had dawned

and died since his arrival, each holding its own little history of meetings and partings, of picnics and dancing, of pleasures and disappointments; and still Mr. Brett lingered on at Honeycott, while his relatives remained at Southerleigh Court.

Lady Grace Trumoin and her mother were also still the guests of Lord and Lady Domaford, having outstayed many visitors at Monksbere. But it was tacitly understood that the week of the festivities for Odo's coming of age was to end their stay.

"By that time things must have settled themselves one way or the other," Lady Grace remarked to her parent, and her tone was despondent. But neither the despondency nor the remark was quite sincere.

Lady Grace was enjoying her summer at Monksbere very much, and had no desire to cut it short by any premature announcement of failure. Having far better opportunities of judging than her mamma or Lord Domaford, she realized the hopelessness of their plans for Odo's future and her own; but she also realized that the companionship of his cousin was growing daily more attractive to her.

The conviction of her imprudence lent an additional piquancy to the situation. She persuaded herself that she was endeavouring to carry out her mother's wishes by making herself agreeable to Odo, when she was in reality engaged upon an attempted flirtation with Conrade, who was less insensible to her flattery, and very willing to advise her upon all the points which she meekly submitted to his judgment.

Her secret liking for him blinded her to his indifference, and she desired to prolong her stay in his vicinity as long as possible.

The gatherings at Southerleigh were of so informal a kind that chaperonage was practically dispensed with altogether;

the young people made their expeditions chiefly under the auspices of Mr. Silas Brett, who was so sympathetic that, as they remarked to each other, he hardly counted as an elder at all.

He never grew tired, never gave advice, and never interrupted anybody; but sat for hours in silence, chewing grass, or making mysterious entries in a pocket-book; he indulged in his favourite hobby of photography, or loaded himself with his daughter's wraps, in an ever unruffled calm.

When a distant excursion was planned, he hired horses and carriages with the utmost recklessness. Telegrams signed "Silas Q. Brett" flew in every direction, and preceded the arrival of the joyous party at country inns, ensuring attention and plenty instead of the indifferent fare usually provided.

Charlotte's meagre and inexperienced housekeeping at the Court was also supplemented by Mr. Brett's gallantry and forethought.

Hampers addressed to Miss Fish were constantly arriving from London, and even from Paris.

Epicurean delicacies and boxes of bonbons appeared, with baskets of hot-house fruit a thousand times finer than any grown in the humble glass-houses of Southerleigh, and rivalling even the specimens which Lord Domaford's head gardener was carefully cultivating for the coming flower-show.

Charlotte had loudly lamented the absence of dessert from her table, and as loudly reproved old Weston for the deficiency; but she was met by forcible retorts.

"What yu putts intu a garden, that yu takes out and increases a hundred-fold," he said, dimly believing himself to be quoting Scripture, to the confusion of his employer's unreason. "If yu putts in nart, yu takes out nart. I yaint had no yeat this many a day. Coals be tu dear, zays

Mr. Luxton and yu. There bain't niver been no indar frute here tu speak on, nar there won't never be none; till yu builds a proper like house far 't, and gives me yeat, and putts money intu planting. The strawberries was gude, and zo was the currants, but yu can't luke vor they tu last vor ever. There be a plenty of green apples, and the peaches and plums will be ripe when the Lard chuses. 'Tis He as makes the seasons vor the warl-frute, not me."

Charlotte found herself growing discontented, with the advance of the summer. Dress as she would, and command as she might, and conscious as she was of her own importance as a land-owner, she was somehow always the least regarded person present, whether the party were large or small.

If it consisted only of themselves, it was a foregone conclusion that the other young ladies would occupy between them the exclusive attention of Conrade, Odo, Lord Kerswell, and Iron Brett, and that she would be left to the silent companionship of old Silas, who, though he was invariably polite, and willing to make Charlotte the most expensive presents, had as little to say to her as she had to him.

When other visitors from Monksbere joined them, she gained very little; for though they were usually intimate with each other, they had nothing in common with Miss Fish.

Charlotte was forced to fall back upon the despised Hortopps, and to ask Percy and Alexander and their sisters to join the party, which they were nothing loth to do.

"It's very hard on me," she complained to Kitty, in exactly the tone which she had used in her childhood when given, by common consent of the rest of the party, the worst part in a charade. "The only person who takes the trouble to be civil to me is Lord Domaford, whom I can't bear; and besides, he is a married man! Ma always said that everybody would make up to me and want to marry me

for my money. I can't say I see signs of anything of the kind."

"I am sure we are all very fond of you, Charlotte," said Kitty, hastily. She cast about her for consolation. "Only yesterday Lord Kerswell was saying how good-natured you were."

Poor Charlotte was but too easily pleased with the smallest compliment, for compliments rarely came her way.

"Was he indeed? I'm sure it's very good of you to tell me so, Kitty, when every one knows how glad you would be to get him for yourself," she said warmly. "Not that I blame you in the least," she hastened to add, seeing Kitty's face flame and her eyes flash. "It is very natural, I'm sure, when one thinks who he is and all. And I'm sure Lady Grace flirts with him in the most outrageous way. But I always say one gains nothing in the end by putting one's self forward. So he said I was good-natured! I expect it was because I made room for him in the waggonette beside me. Did you see me do it?"

"I can't say I did."

"*He* must have seen, for he came directly and sat there. I felt sure he was pleased, and Lady Grace looked quite disappointed. I don't like Lady Grace at all, Kitty. She may be distinguished *looking*, as Lord Domaford says (it makes me quite sick to hear him raving about her almost to her face), but I am sure she has a very vulgar mind. She tells the most shocking stories. She does not mind what she says, even before gentlemen. I grow hot and cold."

"It is only because she is so fashionable," said Kitty, apologetically. "I don't like it any more than you do, but one must make allowances for fashionable people. She is supposed to be amusing."

"She does not amuse me, I can tell you," said Charlotte, severely; "and Zoe is even more shocked than I am. It

will give her quite a wrong notion of English girls of that class."

"Oh, Charlotte, don't be an idiot. Is Zoe so dull as to suppose English girls are all alike? Do we imagine that all American girls are as clever and charming as she is, or all American mothers as foolish as Mrs. Brett, or all American fathers as indulgent as dear old Silas? As if Zoe would judge anything from a single specimen like that."

"Well, it is very unpleasant for me," said Charlotte; "who has the responsibility of it all."

"I don't see what responsibility you have," said Kitty; "it is Lady Domaford who is responsible for Lady Grace. She isn't staying in your house."

"No, nor ever will be," said Charlotte, indignantly. "She may look down her long nose at me as much as ever she likes, but I should never invite her. And as for her behaviour, I think the poor Hortopps that you all look down upon, are far better behaved and not half so vulgar as Lady Grace."

"The Hortopps are not vulgar at all. They are genteel, which is far worse," said Kitty, with a laugh.

"They are the only people here who are as civil to me as they ought to be," said Charlotte, looking much inclined to weep, "and I wish Conrade would be more civil than he is to poor Percy."

"Conrade doesn't like Percy, and I wish you wouldn't ask the Hortopps. They spoil our party. Alexander isn't so bad, but the others are impossible," said Kitty, decidedly.

"I like Alexander better than Percy myself, though he isn't so good-looking; but he never seems to come out of his way to talk to *me*," said Charlotte, dejectedly. "If it wasn't for ma, who would say 'I told you so,' and make herself as unpleasant as usual, I sometimes think, between ourselves, Kitty, that I would sell the whole place, lock, stock, and

barrel, and go back to Plymouth. As I told James Luxton I should, if he went on much more about repairs at the farm. Plymouth is far more cheerful than this when all is said and done. I do my best to entertain every one, as I said I would; and here is Zoe running after you, and you after dukes and duchesses, invited to Scotland and all. And what happens to me? Nothing, so far as I can see. It is most unfair. I have always been the unlucky one."

"Oh, Charlotte, when Southerleigh is your very own," said Kitty, with a sigh, as she looked at the white walls of her old home.

They sat beneath the great cedar tree on the lawn during this conversation; Kitty in the hammock, and Charlotte in a substantial garden-chair more suited to her weight.

Kitty enjoyed an idle morning very much as a rule, and still more did she enjoy the elegance of wearing one of her favourite white muslins, with a rose at her belt, and a shady hat tipped becomingly over her white brow; but to-day she was depressed, and had a little cold, and was altogether a less bright and hopeful Kitty than usual. She looked at Charlotte and felt much inclined to criticize her elaborate and inappropriate morning dress of poplin, lace, and ribbons; but her ill-humour did not carry her quite so far as that. Poor Charlotte's dresses, be they ever so new or expensive, seldom looked fresh. If she only tied a bow or pinned a ruffle, a crumple or a grease-mark remained as evidence of her ingenuity; but Kitty had French fingers, as well as French taste in these matters.

"Southerleigh is nothing but a trouble," said its owner, discontentedly. "A lot of people eating one out of house and home, as ma says. I mean to shut it up and go abroad this winter, whether she will come with me or not. I would go to New York with the Bretts—I am sure they have

begged me with tears in their eyes—only I am so frightened of the voyage. Even crossing the Channel upsets me for days. I tell you what, Kitty, you shall come to Rome with me in the winter, if we can get ma to come with us; or if not, we can very easily get some other old person," said Charlotte, who, though young, was a rigid stickler for the proprieties.

"It is very kind of you, but it is too soon to make plans for the winter," said Kitty; and her blue eyes grew dreamy. "Besides, it is Rosaleen who wants so much to go to Rome."

"What good would Rosaleen do me?" said Charlotte, reproachfully. "I fancy I can see her; mooning about picture-galleries and churches, and raving about statues with nothing on; which always makes me uncomfortable. She would be no more companion than she is at this minute, when I suppose she is in the old bull-house making her mud-pies."

"Yes, she is there. She spends her whole morning there—and she is modelling a head of Iron Brett; and he is sitting to her, and reading Shakespeare out loud. I wouldn't be her for anything," said Kitty, sincerely.

"I would not be *him*, with the floor nothing but trodden earth, and the beams all cobwebs, and bats in the corner," cried Charlotte. "What is the use of being a millionaire if you have to sit in a place like that? For my part I never can believe he is as rich as they say. He has never shown *me* any signs of it. Look at his uncle, how he scatters money about. There is no mistaking him or Zoe either, who spends what she chooses; nothing is too good for her. But if Mr. Brett was really a millionaire, how could he care to stop at Honeycott, where the piano isn't even a good one, though he is strumming upon it from morning till night? And without even a servant, except old Pélagie, who hardly counts."

Kitty laughed disdainfully. She seldom troubled herself to explain anything to Charlotte, and in consequence Charlotte found her a pleasant companion. People who knew her less well were apt to correct her often astounding assertions, or to point out what they really meant when she misunderstood them; but Rosaleen and Kitty now no longer attempted to dive below the surface of her inconsequences; they instinctively kept silence on all subjects of real moment or interest in her presence. When Charlotte touched sacred things they became common; and Rosaleen and Kitty, having found this out, revealed to her nothing of their inner thoughts.

"I often wonder why Iron Brett came over at all," said Charlotte, after pausing in vain for an answer. "Zoe says it was to take care of her and her father and mother, because they had never travelled in Europe before. But I cannot believe any man would cross the Atlantic just for that. Your cold seems very heavy, Kitty. What do you take for it?"

"I take a little handkerchief," said Kitty, peevishly.

"I only hope I shan't catch it; but I am so unlucky that I dare say I shall," said Charlotte, with a sigh, "and to-morrow I have to go and visit the school and make a speech. Mr. Webber has asked me at last. I may say it is the first attention he has ever shown me in spite of all my subscriptions."

"I should make a very short speech, if I were you," said Kitty.

"Why should it be short?" said Charlotte, aggrieved. "I shall say everything I can think of. He might never ask me again."

As Kitty had supposed, Rosaleen was at this moment very busy with her clay.

She stood in the centre of the disused shed, beneath the

slanting skylight; it afforded her work a better illumination than the great open doorway which led into the orchard, and was overshadowed by branching foliage.

Iron Brett was not reading Shakespeare, but apparently gazing through the opening at the old damson tree, which held its burden of little blue plums, or occasionally dropped one, that fell with quite a thud in the silence.

Rosaleen was absorbed in her work, and her sitter in thought. He was a wonderful model, patient and motionless. And he had not even smiled at his own effigy in its earlier stages, or when its nose came off in her hand, to her dismay.

His face was ornamented with clay smudges where the calipers had inadvertently touched him during her anxious verification of measurements; but he was unaware of this, and if he had known he would not have cared.

The Vicomte had meant to be very discreet concerning Lord Kerswell's proposal for the hand of his beloved grandchild. But his triumph and excitement were so great that the need for sympathy became imperative.

He had, besides, become accustomed to confide in his young friend, who was growing each day more like his friend of other days.

He had unburdened himself during his morning cigarette.

"The words spoken in your wisdom, my son, have justified themselves. The suitors of whom you spoke have already arrived. Myself, I have given great attention to the matter since you put it into my head. This brave and excellent young nobleman demands my little one from me. He now tells me that his parents will accord her a welcome extraordinary; but he begs me to be discreet, not to alarm her. I adore him already for his discretion, coupled with his love."

Mr. Brett listened with his usual attention.

"I suppose it would be a very wonderful marriage for Miss Kitty—from your point of view?" he said thoughtfully.

"*Je le crois bien*," said the Vicomte; "but let us understand each other. I would on no account force the little one's inclinations; myself, I have not much doubt she will certainly accept him."

Mr. Brett was silent for a moment.

"You said *suitors*," he remarked presently. "Has any one else come forward?"

The Vicomte chuckled. "*Pas encore*. But since your warning my eyes are open. I perceive that Rosaleen too is admired—that she is loved—and by one who has known her from childhood. Yes, I reflect. I call to mind those early days when the young Odo confided in none but her. Together they sat under that fig tree. Together they ate of my peaches and my pears. It was he who persuaded his mother to give a dance for my little ones. He is not polished, but he is at heart a good lad, and a loyal one. I love him well. His parents will doubtless raise difficulties. They thwart his desires always, but in the end they are obliged to give way, for this young man has a strong character. Besides, what can they say when I shall reveal to him the amount of her *dot*? I await but his application. The first intimation must come certainly from the young man or his parents," said the Vicomte, with dignity, "and it would not become a young girl to mention such subjects to me until I can myself announce to her that I have consented; but, nevertheless, I have perceived that she has been of late more than usually *distraite* and pensive; that she reddens often, and starts when spoken to, as though awakened from a dream. Have you, too, perceived these things?"

"I have so," said the American; and he coloured slightly.

"What conclusion do I draw," said the Vicomte, tenderly. "She loves! This young girl—this soul so timid, so ardent and so pure, loves and knows it not."

Mr. Brett looked away from the Vicomte and said nothing.

"It is not only I who have thus observed," said the Vicomte, joyously. "I have talked to my friend, James Luxton; he also considers it probable. A lawyer is not so romantic as a poor old fond grandpapa. Thus you will perceive that, though she marries, she will be yet near me. One of my little ones I shall have always within my reach; and to close my eyes when the time comes for this pious and filial duty. It matters not which. They are equally dear. Both are my children and the children of my child. And I must bear the absence of the other with what philosophy I can."

Rosaleen's soft voice broke in on the musings of her sitter.

"Would you tell me the time? You've been *so* good this morning, but I mustn't keep you for ever, and I must help Pélagie to get lunch."

Mr. Brett looked at his watch. "Were you ever known to forget a duty, I wonder?" he said.

"Oh, don't!" said Rosaleen, entreatingly. "It's as bad as though you told me outright that you thought me a prig like the others do. And Kitty does more to help Pélagie than I do."

"I should say you were pretty equal that way, and both bad to beat for housewifery, and that's a fact."

"Well, we're accustomed to do things for ourselves," said Rosaleen, apologetically. "Grandpapa has never been well off, and if he had been, I don't think he could have borne to be idle."

"I wonder if you'll ever take my word for it, that money doesn't excuse a man from work," he said, with his rare and pleasant smile.

"Why, it is what I have always thought myself," she cried ingenuously.

"We seem to think alike on a pretty good number of subjects," he said meditatively.

Rosaleen blushed.

"But you may be thinking of a different kind of work," she said timidly, "of—getting more money, for instance?"

"I wouldn't mind getting more," he admitted.

"But—but—Mr. Brett, you're not *fond* of money, are you?"

"Well, I guess I am," said Mr. Brett.

She did not answer, but her look was expressive of disappointment.

He took the wooden modelling tool gently from her hand and laid it down.

"Suppose you come and talk this matter over with me?" he said. "I think you've stood long enough this morning. You want a rest. And there's an hour at least before you need go to Pélagie yet."

Rosaleen made no objection, she threw aside the long white overall, which covered her dress from neck to hem, and stepped outside the shed to wash her hands in a little stream that ran from the rusty mouth of an iron pipe, into an old stone trough below a red bank. She cleansed her fingers of the clay, and dried them on the soft brown moss below and around the trough.

Mr. Brett watched her as she knelt beside the running water. Above her the lichen-covered apple trees crossed and recrossed their old gnarled branches, heavily laden here and there with red and russet apples. The sunshine

filtered through the green leaves and flickered upon her thick raven hair, twisted into a burnished crown for her little head, and growing into natural curls and waving tendrils low on her neck, beneath the line where the sunburn met the whiteness of her throat. She came back to the doorway, pulling down the rolled-up sleeves of her pink cotton bodice, and gravely accepted the chair he offered.

Mr. Brett rested himself from his long sitting by leaning up against the door-post beside Rosaleen's chair, and looking down upon her, and upon the fringe of down-cast black eyelashes above the clear glowing brown of her cheeks.

"I'm afraid you would think the worse of a man—for being fond of money," he said seriously, but his bright eyes twinkled.

"It would depend—*why* he was fond of it," she said doubtfully.

"The reason most men like it," suggested Mr. Brett, "is that they may be able to give some woman everything she wants."

"But she—she mightn't want him to do that—some women don't care for the things that money can buy."

"Don't you think that's just a way of talking? What kind of things?"

"Why—carriages and horses, and fine clothes, and jewels and luxuries, I suppose," said Rosaleen.

"Is that all? I should say it meant a lot more than small unimportant details like that. Money means whatever you want it to mean. Everything that makes life worth living. Mountains and lakes and scenery—you can't travel without it. Books and pictures and statues—if you like beautiful things about you, you've got to pay for them in this world. Music, if you care for the best

—it's expensive. Solitude, gardens, flowers; physic for the sick—relief from pain—rest for the old who can work no more——"

"Oh, hush!" she cried, and laughed. "If it could be made to mean all that. But very rich people generally grow selfish, and fond of luxury, don't they? Of course I mean nothing personal," she added, with the mingled frankness and delicacy of a child. "But the history of the world tells us so."

"That's all right," said Mr. Brett, with a nod of understanding. "When we come to the history of the world, I grant you the rich man's got a bad name. His record in the past won't bear looking into. He thought nothing of grinding the poor beneath the wheels of his chariot when he felt like taking a drive; and the poor thought nothing of it either. It seemed to them very natural, and they'd have done the same by him if they'd had the chance. The rich were raised in arrogance and idleness, and pampered and flattered from their cradles, so they were able to believe in their own superiority to the folk around. They hung themselves with jewels, and bought slaves to wait on them, and ate more than was good for them because they liked to have other people envy them."

"But the philosophers never envied them," said Rosaleen; "great men of all ages have despised feasting and idling and self-indulgence."

"Just so," said Mr. Brett, "but it takes the mob quite a while to catch up with the ideas of the philosophers. They're generally a few centuries behind; but they've got to get there at last. The mob of to-morrow will be an educated mob, not a blind force led with a string by a little dog of a tyrant. And the millionaires of to-day have mostly sprung from the mob. They know the realities of life and work. They know that indulgence in personal

luxury deteriorates the individual mentally and physically, and they know that display and ostentation rouse contempt instead of awe among their fellow-creatures. The plutocrat of to-day," said Mr. Brett, slowly, "is aware that he has a power which isn't always accorded to reigning monarchs; but he's beginning to perceive that his responsibilities are exactly in proportion to that power; and that to use them rightly for the benefit of the race is about the biggest thing a man can do in this world."

Rosaleen listened with dewy eyes and parted lips.

"I believe we could help each other some, Miss Rosaleen," said Mr. Brett. "Money isn't much use without ideas, and ideas can't always be carried out without money. I've got money and you've got ideas; only like most English people you're rather afraid to say anything about them, for fear somebody might accuse you of wanting to be original. Your old proverbs have gone on telling you there's nothing new under the sun till you've grown to believe them; but in America we know that there are plenty of new things under the sun for those who have the wit to find them out. English people are very fond of looking backward to see what their ancestors have done in the past under quite different circumstances, and that appears to me downright futile. We're heirs of the ages; just so, but we've got to review our inheritance in the light of our present experience; and that light is just as much stronger than theirs was, as our telescopes can see further than their eyes, or our guns shoot further than their bows and arrows. We've got to quit brooding over the past and go right forward. Our ideals have got to grow bigger. Instead of thinking for ever of our individual happiness, we've got to think of the race. We want those that come after us to stand on a far higher level of civilization than we do, even if we have to sacrifice our personal pleasure to

make the way ready for them. A few people see this already, and a lot more will see it presently. You and I see it, and we're going to work all we know. If we add to the health or the happiness of only half a million human beings, we've done something," said Mr. Brett, calmly.

"Half a million!"

"Well, if you figure it out, it wouldn't take long to arrive at a little quantity like that," he said apologetically. "Take it you endow a college for scientific research—your professors have only got to discover a cure for a single disease to benefit a lot more than that, directly or indirectly. And if you take only a few thousand children and educate them physically, mentally, and morally, you can't exactly multiply the results even in your own average lifetime. It would mount up so quickly. You see my ideas don't run to originality like yours, Miss Rosaleen."

"Don't—don't laugh at me," said Rosaleen, imploringly; but she smiled at him, though the tears trembled on her long black lashes.

"Do I look like laughing?" said Mr. Brett. "I'm asking you to help me— if you would——"

"Would I help you—why, it's like a dream coming true. With all my heart and soul," she cried.

The American drew a step nearer, and looked at her so tenderly that she blushed.

"About that partnership, Miss Rosaleen——" said Mr. Brett.

CHAPTER XX

"KITTY, will you marry me?"

"I can't."

"Do you mean that it will be—somebody else?"

"I don't know," said Kitty.

The autumn flowers were opening before their time, in response to the brilliance of the sunshine and the dryness of the weather; and the garden glowed with every hue of the rainbow; for the Vicomte heaped colour upon colour in dazzling profusion, with a sure trust in Nature's power of harmonizing the background.

A tortoiseshell butterfly sunned itself upon the wall, and the bumble-bees were buzzing over the Michaelmas daisies and the red autumn roses.

Lord Kerswell was sitting on the grass beside a wicker chair, where Kitty leant forward in her favourite attitude, elbow on knee and chin in hand, her blue eyes looking across the garden and far away to the distant purple of the hills.

They were in full view of the windows of the cottage, where the Vicomte was in careful hiding, dismally sacrificing his desire to be out in the air to his hopes that Lord Kerswell might speed his wooing.

"Kitty, one reason why I am so fond of you is that you have quite a lot of common sense," said Lord Kerswell.

He spoke in steady tones, from which he had banished all expression of emotion or sentiment.

"You say you don't know if it will be anybody else, but in your heart you are sure it will be—somebody—if not now—then later. Now, I'm trying honestly to see this matter from your point of view. That I love you, and want to marry you"—he spoke hurriedly—"you know already; but besides that, beyond that, beyond all things,—I'm your *friend* if you'll believe me."

"I do believe you, Tommy," said Kitty, and in token of gratitude she lightly touched the plump hand that rested on the arm of her chair.

"Then listen to me," said Tommy; "for Heaven's sake, listen to me, and believe that I'm putting plain facts before you. *Why* are you—throwing me away like this?"

Kitty let her sorrowful blue eyes rest for one moment on his face, smiled faintly, and looked away from him again. So expressive was her look that Kerswell was hardly conscious that she had not spoken.

"Yes, I know," he said vehemently, "you think that now. Everybody must have their fancies. I quite understand that. But listen, Kitty. You are very young, and very, very pretty; you are fond of gaiety, and you are exactly formed to shine in the—in the kind of life you would have to lead if you married me. Now, I'm not romantic. I don't pretend to be; but I should make you a very good husband. We could be real good pals, you and me, and you *know* we could. I should be always wanting to make you as happy as I could, and always ready to let you do anything you liked. I'm not rich; but if I gave up racing we should do very well. I am ready to give up racing." His tone was heroic. "Zoe says"—he laughed nervously—"that a woman who occupies my mother's position has a real good time. You would occupy my mother's position one day, and you could have as good a time as ever you chose."

He searched desperately for arguments.

"I'm saying things I shouldn't otherwise dream of saying," said Tommy, turning rather white, "because a drowning man catches at a straw. But a girl who has no mother to advise her overlooks heaps of things of vital importance sometimes, for the sake of a passing fancy. And in later life she may regret. She may come to feel that besides breaking somebody's heart, she has thrown away everything life holds that makes it worth living."

"Oh, Tommy," said Kitty, "I will say it all for you if you choose, without any such painful effort as you are making now. I am not a fool. I see everything just as plainly as you do, and though I have less experience than you, I have learnt a great many things lately. Of course I know that if I married you I should be a duchess some day, and a marchioness that very moment, and that people like Lady Domaford would never be rude to me or snub me any more. And I could dress beautifully and wear your family jewels, and go to every ball I wanted to, and always be Somebody wherever I went, which I should enjoy even more than being what you call pretty. And I should live at Alnoth Castle, in the very heart of the atmosphere I love best in the world; in an old, old house, all space and beauty—among wonderful gardens,—and with unlimited opportunities of being kind to the poor and of making my neighbours adore me. I am so vain that all this would be delightful to me; so vain that my heart beats at the mere imagination; but——"

"Kitty, Kitty, it's all true. You would be all that, and more. Why, you put it a hundred times better than I could. And—and on the top of it all you don't dislike me; you know you don't."

"On the contrary, I like you very much. We are both, as you say, full of common sense. We are both good-

tempered and pleasant to live with, and rather inclined to be frivolous. We should be excellent companions. And it would be the kind of life of all others that I should prefer."

"And what sort of a life would you be chucking it away for?" said Tommy, with a bitterness he could not help. How could Kitty be at once so reasonable and so hard to move? "Oh, Kitty, forgive me if I put things too plainly. But we are friends—and how can friends talk together in confidence if they are to use any disguises?"

"I don't want to use disguises; and I am quite willing to be frank, Tommy. You are my friend, and I will be sincere with you. I never had a great friend before, and we were very frank with each other from the first. I suppose that is how you found out—what I hoped nobody in the world would find out. If I ever married—somebody else—I know very well I should have to lead a different life from the one you offer me. I have pictured it to myself, Tommy, quite as vividly as ever you could. I am not at all strong, and the climate of—India—would probably kil me. Anyway, I should lose my complexion, and what you like to call my prettiness. I should be very poor, and I hate poverty. I should be nobody, and I don't like being nobody. I said just now that you were good-tempered and pleasant—I should be with some one"—she spoke in steady tones—"who is rather *difficile* than otherwise."

"And do you suppose that when you are ill, and tired, and your prettiness gone—if it could ever go, which I do not believe," he cried, with passionate inconsistency, "that you would not wish yourself back again as you were before?"

"I dare say I should," she answered readily.

"Then, Kitty, I must tell you—it is *not* common sense," he said angrily.

The lovely colour rose in her face.

"It is not common sense," said Kitty, "but it is love."

He was silent.

"If a woman cares at all for the man who loves her," said Kitty, softly, "she is ready—I am certain—to follow him barefoot through the world; though I dare say that sounds very foolish and romantic to you."

Tommy jumped up suddenly, and went quickly across the lawn as though it were of the last importance that a cushion and a book lying on the grass should be picked up and put in their places. Then he came back, looked at Kitty, and knelt down by the wicker chair.

"The moment has come," thought the Vicomte, delightedly, "but certainly I shall presently be able to offer my felicitations, and to walk once more in the garden before this sunshine superb has disappeared." He withdrew from the window of his little study, and sinking into the wide chair before his writing-table, prepared joyfully to give the young couple his blessing, and to announce the amount of Kitty's portion to her *fiancé*.

"Kitty," said Kerswell, "I have a confession to make to you."

"Yes?"

"I said I was not romantic. It is a lie. I am romantic. I am worse than you are. Though I am a fat, plain, ridiculous man, living in the nineteenth century, I could not be more romantic if I were a Knight of King Arthur's Round Table, or—or a Crusader, or one of Byron's heroes, or any one you please to mention. You said you would follow the man you loved barefoot through the world *if he loved you.* I go one better," gasped Tommy. "I would lay down my life for you, without waiting to know if you loved me or not."

Kitty looked at him and forgot that he had called himself

a plain, fat, ridiculous man; she saw only the tears shining in his small twinkling eyes, and the pale transfigured earnestness of his usually rosy face.

"Oh, Tommy, it can't be as bad as all that," she said in concerned tones.

"It is all that and more," he said. "What is your love by the side of mine? You are hardly more than a child, Kitty, and it is your first love. What is first love? Nothing. A passing fancy—one lives to laugh at it. But I am a man. I am eighteen years older than you are. I shall live and die alone if you won't have me."

"No, you won't," said Kitty, soothingly. "You know your people want you to marry; you will think of them. And I'm sure they don't want you to marry *me*."

"You think they are worldly," said Tommy, "and perhaps they are. Perhaps we all are." His voice shook a little. "But look at the letter my mother has written to me, Kitty, in answer to mine. It would—please me very much if you would read it."

He took out his pocket-book and extracted very carefully a small note, heavily monogrammed and coronetted, and breathing perfume of lilac.

"*My darling, darling boy*," the worldly Duchess had written in a very shaky handwriting. "*I have just read your letter. God bless you a thousand times. Be sure that your father and I love and trust you far too well not to welcome from our hearts the bride you have chosen—when she is yours*——"

Kitty's eyes filled with tears.

"Thank you, Tommy," she said humbly. "But I don't deserve it."

"Can't you give me a little hope—for the future?" he said gently.

"Do you mean that if I don't marry—some one I love

better, will I—a long time hence—marry you?" she said with great directness.

"That is what I mean. But I don't see why it should be a long time hence. I meant directly you are *sure*," said Tommy, slowly, "that you are not going to marry—some one else."

Kitty reflected.

"If I were quite sure he didn't love me—or that he was engaged to marry another person," she said calmly. "Yes, I would marry you whenever you liked. I should not like to be an old maid, and I would rather marry you than any one else, for every reason."

"That is a promise?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you, Kitty," said Kerswell, gravely. He lifted his cap.

"I should be broken-hearted, you know," said Kitty, simply.

"Yes, I know," said Tommy. "I'm not asking for more than you have given me already; the right to take you away with me and comfort you in my own way—when the day comes."

"I hope it may never come," said Kitty, passionately. "If it does, it will kill me."

"No, for I shall be there, and I will not let you die."

She laughed hysterically.

"Oh, Tommy, what fools we both are. Arguing whether I shall die or not. As if love ever killed anybody nowadays, and as if you were a doctor to stop it if it did."

"I would not give much for your chances of recovery if I were a doctor," said Tommy, relaxing into a smile. "It is lucky for you I am not."

CHAPTER XXI

THE festivities in honour of Odo's coming of age were to be distributed over several days, and did not begin until the young gentleman had already passed his twenty-first birthday by some weeks.

Lord Domaford had hoped by this postponement not only to be able to announce his son's engagement, but also to ensure the attendance at the banquet he proposed to give, of one or two county magnates who would otherwise be absent yachting or grouse-shooting.

A monster fête to the townsfolk of Domaford, a treat to the school-children of the four surrounding parishes, a cricket-match between Domaford and Remberton, and a servants' ball, had already taken place; and all energies were now to be concentrated on the final triumph of the last day of the rejoicings.

There was to be a flower-show in the afternoon, which the whole neighbourhood was expected to attend, preceded by an informal luncheon in one of the many tents erected in the park, to which the tenants were to be invited, together with a few of the nearest neighbours, who would help to swell their numbers.

During the afternoon the guests invited to dine and sleep at Monksbere for the ball were to arrive.

Lord Domaford had taken care not to invite them in time for the luncheon, for more than one reason.

He desired to pose as a popular landlord and a great

man, but his tenants had been in many cases his father's friends and equals, and he felt he could more easily steer the happy medium between forgetfulness and familiarity without too many onlookers.

The tenants, he was determined, should have their say; no one should be able to complain that he had denied them the opportunity; but he desired that the audience should be confined to his near neighbours—who had already heard all the farmers had to say upon the subject—and to his house-party, whose minds he had carefully prepared for the ordeal.

In his most benevolent accents he told John Webber, the stalwart parson, that he wanted the gathering to be as informal and as friendly as possible; and he congratulated himself privately upon his own diplomacy and tact when he reflected that, beyond the insignificant inhabitants of Southerleigh and Honeycott, and a sprinkling of the local clergy, no one would hear the possibly embarrassing references to the humble position occupied by his forefathers.

It was for this reason, rather than from any excessive humility, that he begged the local reporters to refrain from intrusion. Their opportunity was to come in the evening, when speeches, which were quite sure to be tactful and pleasant, would be made at the great dinner, and when the names of some of the speakers would be worth printing. He took such care to flatter and compensate the local reporters that they were more than willing to forego the stuffy atmosphere of the luncheon-tent and the informal remarks of the rustics who would be there present.

Lord Domaford was as yet by no means so popular with the county in general as he could have wished. The proportion of local magnates who refused his warm invitation to dine and sleep at Monksbere appeared to him unduly large; and many on whom he had positively counted failed

him. But a ball is always an attraction, and he had managed to secure a sufficient number of people to fill the long rows of spare-rooms at Monksbere, and to supplement his already numerous house-party for the occasion.

Lord Domaford had his hands full, but he greatly loved management and display; and from the decoration of the triumphal arches to the preparation of the ménus, superintended all the arrangements in person, accepting only occasional aid from his nephew Conrade and his wife's secretary. He was, indeed, almost ubiquitous, and it fatigued his wife merely to see him so busy, so that when the great day arrived she shut herself up with her dogs in the boudoir, until it was time for her appearance at the luncheon. She then sallied forth magnificently attired in silk of that particular shade of blue that is most trying to a middle-aged and sallow complexion; but having no eye for such detail, she was spared any anxiety regarding her appearance, and wended her way to the tent with her guests, in a most complacent mood.

Odo had given no hint of his matrimonial intentions, and though Lord Domaford was still keen and hopeful regarding the ultimate success of his plans for his son's happiness, his wife was growing very tired of her visitors, and beginning to wonder why she ever wished for the marriage at all. She had not renewed her earlier pressing invitations to Lady Grace and her mother to prolong their stay beyond the night of the ball, and she was quite in good spirits when she reflected that this was therefore to be the last day of their visit.

"I hope you will not mind your company," said Lord Domaford, delicately picking his way across the park by the side of the tall and stately figure of Lady Magloire. "They are really delightful fellows when you know them. Perhaps inclined to be a little hail-fellow-well-met with me, but as

you know, my father was one of themselves," said Lord Domaford, with a masterly mixture of pride and simplicity which he felt was certain of its effect; "and I could not take offence at anything they say. Dear creatures. I love them all. But though I have given orders for excessive care in ventilation, I am quite too afraid you may find the tent unpleasantly warm."

Lady Magloire occupied the place of honour on her host's right hand, and her daughter sat next to the hero of the day. The poor lady was not so certain as Odo's father that all was going well, but she hoped for the best, and smiled as perseveringly as she could, in spite of the heat of the tent and the unremitting attentions of her host, whose affectations were beginning to get on her nerves.

The members of the house-party were accommodated at the top table, which stretched across the ends of three others running the whole length of the tent.

Charlotte, to her surprise and joy, found herself included in the august assembly of the Monksbere party, and her nods and smiles at her friends who occupied lower places were not untinged with condescension.

"Though I was only on the outside edge of the top table, so to speak, still I was *there*," she said afterwards to Kitty. "You saw no other local people were there except me. I sat next to Conrade, and Lord Domaford made a point of asking me over and over again if I had everything I wanted. I do not dislike him nearly so much as I did. He is so very attentive to me that if he wasn't a married man I shouldn't know what to think."

Rosaleen and Kitty had come over with the party from Southerleigh, which was chaperoned by Mrs. Silas Q. Brett, in the absence of Mrs. Trethewy, who declined to encourage worldliness by appearing at a flower-show.

The sisters had no aspirations to emulate Charlotte on

their own acccount, but it appeared to them both that, as strangers and foreigners, room might have been found at the table of honour for their American friends.

"It is just like Lord Domaford's jealousy," said Kitty, holding indignant counsel with her sister. "He can't bear anybody to be rich but himself. Until they came, everybody but the Copps were paupers round here; and now everybody is talking of the Bretts and their millions, and so he is determined to snub them. I only pray they won't notice it. I am sure they wouldn't care though, if they did, that is one comfort."

"If we had thought of it—but who could have guessed Lady Domaford would be so ill-bred," said Rosaleen, despairingly; "we might have given Odo a hint. He never thinks of these things for himself; but if we had only suggested it to him, he would have altered the arrangement like a shot."

Kitty managed to whisper a word to Conrade, but he shook his head.

"Too late to alter anything now," he said. But he gave Mrs. Silas his arm with an almost exaggerated courtesy and led her to the top seat of the centre table, where she sat at right angles to her host, and where not a word of her unceasing conversation could escape any of the Monksbere party; and Kitty was not quite sure whether she had bettered matters much.

Odo was generally both cross and nervous on occasions when his father intended him to shine. It was a surprise and a gratification to Lord Domaford to perceive that he was neither upon this particular day.

He ate his luncheon with appetite, laughed and talked with Lady Grace, and appeared altogether to be actually enjoying himself.

Lord Domaford was so much delighted that he was

encouraged, as he observed, when the moment for speech-making arrived, to say a few words on a subject to which he had scarcely intended to allude. He stood up in his place, assumed his best parliamentary attitude, and beamed good-humour and approval upon his attentive audience.

For some ten minutes he delighted them with the hesitating platitudes peculiar to such occasions; then, encouraged by their faint applause, which was somewhat too obviously led by the secretary and the zealous John Webber, he proceeded to touch delicately upon more personal topics.

"I venture to hope," said Lord Domaford, "that, joyful as this occasion is, and must be—to me, I may be enabled before very long to greet you all on a still happier occasion than the present. I mean upon the occasion of my son's marriage." (Laughter and applause.) "The father of an only son"—here the speaker's voice became pathetic—"is naturally anxious to see him married, and you, who have seen my son grow up among you, almost as one of yourselves—if I may say so"— he paused modestly, and the audience again applauded—"will share my hopes. I trust I may be spared to see the coming of age of my son's son." (Here the audience, believing his lordship meant to be funny, laughed heartily, and were hushed by John Webber.) "I hope we may all be spared to see that joyful day." ("'Taint very loikely," said a logical old gentleman in an audible aside, "I be eighty-voor come the noo year.") "You know my custom, when I preside over these er—delightful and convivial gatherings, is to occupy personally a very small share of your attention. We members of Parliament, past and present, have enough of speech-making, and prefer listening to other people when we can," said Lord Domaford, paying a graceful tribute to his chief friend and supporter, who had succeeded him as the representative of

Domaford, and who occupied a place beside him. ("'Ee be keeping the seat warm for Muster Odo," explained the aged commentator.) "Thus I will give way to some one else, of greater eloquence, I hope, than myself, and content myself by simply asking you to drink my son's health."

"Avoor we doos zo," said the oldest tenant, hoisted on to his feet by an enthusiastic wife, and received with a perfect ovation by his delighted neighbours, "I'll zay my speedge zame as I wor told tu zay un, vor I cudent niver happen tu it afterwards, if I may make zo bold as tu tell the truth. Master Odo, I got my speedge arl ready like, and 'twere a proper gude speedge if I cude remember he, but I can't. Mr. Webber I gives un the credit voor making of it oop, var that be ees *doo*, and I learnt it zo well as iver I cude, but it be arl gone clean yout of my yead. It du make me feel vair evil tu think on't. Zo I'll just tellee the truth instead of telling parson's speedges. Master Odo, I wishes 'ee yealth and yappiness, and many of un, and a gude wife"—he glanced slyly but unmistakably towards the corner where Rosaleen and Kitty were sitting on either side of Mr. Silas Brett—"and there's a' many on us as cude tellee where tu luke vor she." (Roars of applause, and a call to order.) "Leave I alone, Mary Ann," said the oldest tenant, elated by his success, and openly addressing his wife among roars of appreciative encouragement. "What be doing on? a-pulling of my coat-tails, drattee. I be a-bleezin' on 'em, bain't I. Doantee hear un? Byes, us'll drink this 'ere yealth wi' dree times dree." Here he thumped the table with such force that a glass was overturned and broken; and, sobered by this misfortune, the oldest tenant sank into his place, and beyond occasionally repeating an incoherent offer to pay for damage done, was heard no more.

A mighty black-bearded farmer of a later generation

next arose, and spoke with a simplicity and directness that were only emphasized by his strong native accent.

"We've known you all yure life, Mr. Odo," he said, looking straight at the young man and addressing him personally. "And we've known you to be a good sportsman and a good neighbour. The two don't always go together. We all knew your grandfather, old Copp of Monksbere. He was a good farmer and a straightforward man. And if any one had told him that his grandson wude live to be a lard, why, he wuden't have believed them any more than I shude credit such a cock-an'-bull story about my Charlie there"—and here he pointed out the blushing and discomfited Charles. "Yure vather's been made a lard, and 'tis a credit tu him. He's gone up above us arl, and it shows what industry and steadiness will do. It's a lesson tu us arl. He's done a lot for Domaford, and he's employed a lot of labour, and woke the old place up. We hope you'll live among us for many years, Mr. Odo, and be as gude a landlord as yure father, and as straightforward a man as yure grandfather. And, as old Daddy Frost has just said, we wish you a gude wife; and that's a blessing which, in my opinion, a man can't give himself too soon."

He mopped his brow, smiled pleasantly at the company, and sat down.

One or two other speakers succeeded him, but only the last achieved a triumph; and that not from any display of eloquence, for he only managed to produce a single sentence.

"I be a man of Zummerzet," he said, "and most on the rest on yu be Devonsheer, and I zays as I agree wi' Varmer Pollock——"

Here his memory appeared to fail him, or perhaps he was a man of few words and had said all he saw any necessity for saying, for he reseated himself and drained his glass without further ado.

The toast being drunk with enthusiasm, Odo rose to return thanks.

His shyness and awkwardness made the ordeal an especially trying one, but though he was not a typical hero for such an occasion, and though his speech was short and gruff, it was popular with the audience.

"I'm much obliged to you all," said Odo, growing scarlet, and fidgeting a good deal. "And I thank you for your good wishes and reciprocate them with all my heart. And as for the happy event you've been kind enough to allude to, why, I can only say I hope it will come off one of these days, and I agree with you, the sooner the better."

During the laughter which followed this effort a great many convictions were expressed that the young gentleman's choice must be already made, and the few unmarried ladies present were scanned with redoubled interest. Public opinion unanimously, if disappointedly, declared for Lady Grace, who displayed a somewhat unnecessary self-consciousness during Odo's speech; and Lord Domaford was so much elated that he forgot to make any comparisons between his son and his nephew, when Conrade's health was presently drunk with an enthusiasm proportionate to his popularity.

Conrade was a hero and a V.C., and it was inevitable that he should be acclaimed as such on his first appearance in public since his return from active service; but his uncle was too happy to be jealous even for Odo's sake.

Though young Waldron might look ever so handsome and soldierly, and though he spoke with all the grace and the eloquence that his cousin lacked, he was a nobody; and, distinguish himself as he might, he must always be regarded as a poor-relation and dependent by Lord Domaford.

He applauded Conrade with condescending warmth, and

said, "Very well indeed, my boy," in his most patronizing tone; but he took no real interest in his speech, and indeed scarcely troubled himself to listen to it at all.

"It is you who ought to go into Parliament, old chap," said Odo, with his usual heartiness and generosity; and he was concerned by the bitterness of Conrade's answering smile.

But there was one person present who made comparisons between the cousins, and found all the advantages on Odo's side.

In the daintiest of grey gossamer frocks, and the tiniest of rose-crowned bonnets, with a demure grey bow tied beneath her pointed chin, and the smallest of high-heeled shoes upon her diminutive feet, Miss Zoe Brett challenged observation of the minutest details of her exquisite toilette.

She furtively dabbed her pretty grey eyes with a doll-like handkerchief of cobweb lace during Conrade's speech, and when he alluded feelingly and earnestly to the esteem in which he held his cousin.

"And so he ought, though I love him for saying so," thought Miss Zoe; "for Odo's as true as steel to him. He hasn't got one speck of guile anywhere about him, Odo hasn't. And I wouldn't exchange him for the handsomest soldier in Europe, though he's as homely as ever he can be to look at. I don't believe looks count in a man. Any way, they oughtn't to, if he's as strong and brave and downright as Odo."

But she was very glad when the speech-making was over, and when she could escape from the hot luncheon-tent into the open air.

The Vicomte was tempted to attend the flower-show, though he had declined to be present at the luncheon. The

local fly was hired, and pulled up the hill between Honeycott and Monksbere by an aged horse, assisted by the driver and by two good-natured labourers who happened to be passing during the worst of the struggle.

Old Patrick leant upon a stick, and was not sorry to accept Rosaleen's strong young arm as he made the round of the tents and inspected with delight the fruit and flowers displayed. The burden of his years was beginning to press heavily upon him, and his activity had perceptibly lessened since his visit to London.

Rosaleen's secret was still her own, and the consciousness of it made her feel especially tender towards her grandfather.

"He ought to be told—first of all," she had said anxiously, when the details of the partnership had been satisfactorily settled between herself and Mr. Brett, "and I think he would like you to ask his permission formally, before I say anything about it. His ideas are very French, and rather old-fashioned."

"That is so, and I want him to know just as badly as you do, but I'd like to choose my own moment for telling him, and I may want to tell one other person before I tell him at all—if I have your permission to do so," he said gravely.

"Why, of course," she said, with happy trustfulness. Then she hesitated and blushed. "Perhaps you want to know first—what your father thinks of it?"

"That'll be all right," said Mr. Brett, cheerfully. "We'll cable along to him as soon as it's all fixed up. I know what his views will be."

"But, supposing Kitty asks me anything meanwhile? It would be *impossible* to keep it from Kitty."

"Then I guess Kitty'll have to know. But she may not ask you; and if she does, I don't believe she'll betray

our little secret to the Vicomte if she knows we don't want her to," said Mr. Brett, smiling.

"I'm sure she won't," said Rosaleen; "we often have to keep things from grandpapa, for his good," she added, so gravely that Mr. Brett did not like to laugh.

But Kitty displayed no curiosity, being at this time too entirely engrossed in her own love affairs to have much attention to spare for her sister, whose increased abstraction she attributed to her dreams of art.

Neither did Kitty connect romance with Mr. Brett. She regarded him rather as the quiet, middle-aged friend of her grandfather than as a young man, and, though she liked him exceedingly, never dreamt of the possibility of his becoming her brother-in-law.

Perhaps Rosaleen was glad to keep her secret and her happiness to herself for a little while; she saw that Mr. Brett had some reason, which he did not wish to tell her, for delaying his communication to the Vicomte, and she had implicit trust in his discretion.

Lord Domaford's attentions to Charlotte continued to delight and embarrass her; he took her through his range of glass-houses, and lamented to her, in the most flatteringly confidential manner, the innumerable worries and expenses which the maintenance of a country house entailed upon its unfortunate owner.

Charlotte was so much impressed that, in return, she related at great length to her host, who employed over fifty men in his gardens and grounds, the details of the wages and allowances exacted from her by her solitary gardener and coachman, and the boy whose services they shared. Lord Domaford appeared to be genuinely concerned by this revelation.

He implored her in moving terms not to submit to be

robbed. He expatiated upon the inability of a single woman to manage an estate; and when Charlotte delicately hinted that it was not her intention to remain single for a day longer than she could help, he hinted still more delicately in reply that a husband would rather add to her expenses than otherwise.

In the midst of his eloquence a slight contretemps occurred which momentarily disconcerted his lordship and covered Charlotte with confusion.

The sun being hot, she opened her parasol, and a shower of leaflets fluttered forth, being Mrs. Trethewy's unsolicited contribution to the flower-show, where she had doubtless hoped they might be distributed in falling amongst the unregenerate crowd; since she could not have intended them exclusively for Lord Domaford, who received most of them upon his shoulders, and unconsciously carried one about in the brim of his broad felt hat for the rest of the afternoon.

Charlotte's apologies were profuse, and Lord Domaford's politeness, when he had recovered from his momentary surprise, was equal to the occasion. He assisted her to poke them into the garden mould with the point of his stick, and resumed his conversation as though nothing had happened.

He did not, however, return to the same topic. Lord Domaford prided himself on knowing exactly when he had said enough; and having, as he hoped, sowed the seeds of discontent with her property in Charlotte's mind, he carefully led the way to another subject, and conversed of his nephew Conrade's virtues and abilities in the most glowing terms, whilst not omitting to hint that his prospects of distinction in the future depended entirely upon his continuance in his profession.

Charlotte, however, was a great deal more interested in

her expenses at Southerleigh than in the good qualities of Conrade. She was as much impressed by Lord Domaford's skilful arguments as he could have desired, and had he fully fathomed all the possibilities of sudden caprice in an ill-governed female mind, he would not have wasted any diplomacy upon Charlotte, but come straight to the point, and suggested taking Southerleigh off her hands then and there.

"To whose care am I to relegate my fair companion?" he asked gallantly, as they neared the turmoil of the tents, "for alas, my dear creature, I must pay for the indulgence of this delightful *tête-à-tête* by devoting myself for the rest of the day to everybody *but* you."

"I have my own guests to look after, and there *is* Mrs. Brett," said Charlotte.

But she had scarcely parted from her host when she caught sight of Mr. James Luxton walking up and down, engaged in earnest conversation with Iron Brett. Charlotte did not hesitate to interrupt them; her methods were more direct than Lord Domaford's; she wanted to talk business with James Luxton, and she said so with the bluntness natural to her; so that Iron Brett, with a somewhat amused glance at his companion, lifted his hat, and walked away by himself.

"But, my dear young lady, I do not talk business at flower-shows," said Mr. Luxton, crossly.

If he had desired to enhance Charlotte's determination, he could not have adopted a surer method of doing so.

To be quite certain that some one was endeavouring to shirk an interview with her was to be doubly resolved that the interview should take place with Charlotte. In spite of his half-amused and half-angry protestations, she walked Mr. Luxton off the main track through the flower-show, and leading him aside, plunged into the usual recital of

grievances and difficulties with which she was accustomed to plague his unwilling ears, during her unwelcome though remunerative calls at his office at Domaford.

But however cordially Mr. Luxton might dislike his client, he could not afford the luxury of quarrelling with her, so he was obliged to listen, however impatiently, to the list of her woes.

Charlotte did not hesitate to call his wandering attention to account.

"I wish you would take a little more interest in my affairs, Mr. Luxton," she said, with something of her mother's sharpness, for the sense of superiority which the possession of wealth occasionally induces, had already somewhat warped Charlotte's original good-nature. "What is the good of my troubling to explain to you how much greater the expenses are than I expected? I am sure you have advised me often enough to be done with the whole thing and sell Southerleigh."

Mr. James Luxton came to himself with a start at these words.

"To sell Southerleigh!" he said, almost as sharply as Charlotte herself had spoken. "What a curious coincidence! Who has been advising you to do that?"

"Why, you yourself, over and over again," said Charlotte, indignantly, "and somebody else who seems to take more interest in me than you do. Though any one would suppose," she added pathetically, "after all that has come and gone, that you would *still* take an interest in my affairs, though you are no longer my guardian and though I am quite independent of you, and could employ another lawyer altogether if I liked."

"I am quite aware of that," said Mr. Luxton, growing rather red and angry. He was generally angry before he had been in Charlotte's company ten minutes.

Miss Fish, did not wish, however, to provoke Mr. Luxton just now. She was full of the subject in hand.

"After what Lord Domaford has been saying to me—and I am sure he was very sympathetic—about the difficulties of managing estates, and all, and being robbed right and left," said Charlotte, vaguely, "I have determined to hesitate no longer. I have made up my mind, let ma triumph as she will, that it would be far better to sell Southerleigh. Only the other day you said you could find me a purchaser; but I suppose, now I want to sell, you'll put all sorts of difficulties in my way."

James Luxton smiled internally at this revelation of Lord Domaford's methods, when he remembered that he was the identical would-be purchaser of whom he had mysteriously spoken to Charlotte.

Something which he had heard that afternoon had made Mr. Luxton less anxious that Lord Domaford should become the owner of Southerleigh.

But it was not for him to reveal professional secrets to any one, far less to Charlotte, of whose indiscretion he was profoundly convinced.

"I knew you would go against me," complained Charlotte, misinterpreting his silence, and her countenance began to exhibit signs of woe. "That's just my luck. I hold out against a thing, and the moment I give way the very person who advised me to do it draws back."

Mr. Luxton was sufficiently acquainted with Charlotte to be aware that opposition would but increase her determination, so he controlled all expression of his delight and surprise at the conclusion to which she had come and replied as severely as he could—

"It is my duty to put difficulties in the way. I must attend to your interests. These things should not be hastily decided."

"Hastily decided!" cried Charlotte. "Ma has been at me ever since I was twelve years old, and you ever since I came of age, advising me to sell. But I was determined to try for myself how I liked living there, and I am very glad I did, for I'm sure I shall never regret the horrid place, if it went for half its value. Not that I would sell it for a penny less than it's worth," she added.

"I am sure you would not," said Mr. Luxton, looking at her with an admiration that was not altogether feigned.

"Of course I wouldn't. I hope I am not a fool," said Charlotte, modestly. "Though I've had a wretched summer, take it all round. Toiling about staring at views and ruins, and watching other people enjoy themselves at my expense. I'm sure I shall never wish to live in the country again. I had more fun at Plymouth when I was only sixteen, and home for the holidays, in spite of ma." Here she shed a tear, and her expression of woe made her, as usual, look so comical that Mr. Luxton had some ado not to laugh, in the midst of his concern lest his client should give way to hysteria or otherwise make a scene. He hastened to soothe her.

"Why, you are scarcely more than sixteen now. I hope you will have plenty of fun at Plymouth yet."

"I dare say I shall," said Charlotte, dismally.. "At least it's a garrison town, and there's always something going on. And a variety of people, not just two or three moonstruck couples and nobody else from morning till night. I don't care how soon I get back, and as soon as the Bretts have gone I shall shut up the Court and send away the servants, who are eating me out of house and home."

"You must do nothing in a hurry," said James Luxton, chuckling to himself, as he perceived how the reiteration of this phrase increased the impatience of Charlotte. "But

if you are absolutely resolved to sell, I have, of course, as your man of business, only one course of action to pursue; that is, to endeavour to obtain the very best possible value for you. And if you will call upon me to-morrow morning at my office, I will try and get hold of—of the man who wants to purchase Southerleigh. You and I know to a halfpenny what the estate is worth, and if he offers a really fancy price for it,—why, I should feel inclined to strike while the iron is hot, and nail him to his bargain," said Mr. Luxton.

CHAPTER XXII

THE Vicomte found the heat and crowd of the flower-show very fatiguing, and having paid his respects to his noble host, and offered his congratulations to Odo, he suggested to Rosaleen that, since she and her sister were returning to Monksbere for the ball, they should now drive back to Honeycott with him.

Perhaps Rosaleen had hoped for a walk home through the woods, in the cool of the evening, with another and younger companion; but if so, she abandoned the prospect cheerfully, sent a messenger for the fly, and looked about for her sister in vain, until she met Lord Kerswell, who informed her that Kitty had a headache, and, in view of the coming dance, had thought it best to return quietly to Honeycott and rest.

"Kitty with a headache! I never knew her have one before. I wonder why she did not tell *me*," said Rosaleen, startled.

"She was afraid you would feel obliged to go home with her, perhaps," suggested Tommy. "I think she wanted to be alone. She would not let me walk over with her, though I begged her to. She said she would go through a short cut in the woods—and no one else went," he added rather hurriedly.

Rosaleen now perceived Conrade coming towards her with Iron Brett, and she could not help connecting Lord Kerswell's last sentence with his glance at his cousin.

"Kitty has gone home with a headache," she said to Mr. Brett, "and I must go back in the fly with grandpapa, for he is tired."

"I'm ready to come away too," said Mr. Brett. "But I believe I'd rather walk than drive."

"You would certainly not be very comfortable in the fly," said Rosaleen, ingenuously, "for when once grandpapa is in it, there is hardly room for me. But I do not like to let him go alone."

"I'll show you the short cut across the woods, Brett," said Conrade. "I've been on duty since nine o'clock this morning, and a short breather would be beneficial. Will you come, Tommy?"

"I suppose we can't very well *all* slope at once," said Kerswell, regretfully. "I'm supposed to be looking for Odo now. Lady Domaford sent me."

"Odo! He's down by the lake showing Zoe how to manage the coracle," said Rosaleen.

"Unless they're both drowned by this time. It seemed likely last time I saw them," said Conrade, dryly.

"I know he is. That's why I came to look for him here," said Kerswell. "Go ahead, old fellow, if you're going. I'll put Miss Rosaleen into her fly, and run back and say I can't see him anywhere."

"Odo has neglected his duties shamefully. I'll tell him what I think of him this evening," said Conrade.

The woods were beginning to show signs of the approach of autumn.

Iron Brett and Conrade walked together over the uncultivated moorland which now formed part of the park at Monksbere.

The path to the woods led through the bracken—green above, but already russet-brown below—which stood stiff

and stark above a carpet of dead leaves and dry sticks and rough turf; for the park was dotted with stunted oak, and yellowing beech, and the weeping birch, whose summer garments had already faded.

The ragged gorse blossomed sparsely, and here and there a group of gnarled apple trees betrayed the demolishment of what had once been the orchard enclosure of some humble home, now levelled to the earth.

Conrade led the way past these silent witnesses of the power of wealth, and Mr. Brett followed; and together the two climbed the fence which divided the park from the Monksbere woods, and followed a woodman's path down the steep incline to the red-banked main road below.

"You can't mistake the way now," said Conrade. "This isn't much more than a timber-chute, but it cuts off a couple of miles at least, if you don't mind scrambling down it somehow."

"I'm all right," responded Mr. Brett, "and I recognize the Domaford road down there. Don't you trouble to come any further."

"Well—to tell the truth, I think I'll come on to Honeycott with you after all, and just ask how Kitty is," said Conrade, colouring slightly. "I scarcely got a chance of speaking to her this afternoon, and I don't like to hear of her being seedy. She's—she's not very strong, you know—never has been since she was a child."

Mr. Brett looked away from Conrade's embarrassed face with careful delicacy.

"I'll be very glad of your company," he remarked, as they began their cautious descent, of the path that was not much better than a timber-chute.

The road below, in the deep overhanging shade of the great beeches, afforded pleasanter walking; they lighted cigarettes, and strolled along in the companionable silence

which is only possible when people like and respect one another.

On the silence there broke the sound of a voice which made them pause on their way and exchange a quick glance of surprise and concern.

For the sound was unmistakably a sob, and was followed by some plaintive words in the voice of Kitty Trethewy; not less audible than was the answer in a man's louder and rougher tones.

"You promised yesterday to send them back."

"I meant to send them to-day. I swear it. They're done up in a packet on my dressing-table, addressed to you. Oh, Kitty, you've never kissed me yet. Kiss me once, and I'll post the letters to-night—whether you'll marry me or not."

Conrade's dark eyes shot a glance at Mr. Brett which said quite plainly and fiercely—

"This is my affair. Don't you try and help me." And the American nodded.

"All right," he said regretfully. "I guess you're big enough to tackle him without my help."

His bright eyes expressed some envy and not a little admiration as he beheld the young man dash through the copse on the lower side of the road in search of the speakers.

There was a confused sound of voices—a cry, and a sudden crash.

"That must have solaced Captain Waldron's feelings *some*," said Mr. Brett to himself.

He walked on a few paces, and came upon a horse tethered to a tree upon the grassy side of the main road.

He recognized it immediately; it belonged to Mr. Percy Hortopp.

The American stood still for a moment, and then an

idea came to him suddenly. A pleasant idea, which made him not only smile, but even laugh to himself.

He looked about, cut a switch from a bush of hazel, untied the horse, mounted him, and rode swiftly away in the direction of Domaford town.

Though Charlotte's lamentations might merely incite her auditors to laughter, the woes of Kitty had no such result, but roused susceptible mankind to such pity and indignation on her behalf that the most disinterested spectator of her grief was ready to become her champion.

Thus Mr. Brett was now riding post-haste to Domaford, burning to avenge her tears; whilst Conrade, still glowing with the mingled fury and relief of a personal encounter with a rival, and forgetful of all his stern intentions, was distractedly calling upon her to forgive him for causing those tears to flow afresh.

"Look up, Kitty! Kitty, my sweet, my darling! I was a brute to frighten you so; but how could I bear to see you crying? It drove me out of my senses. Oh, Kitty, don't tremble so. See, he's gone; he'll never trouble you again. I'm here to take care of you. How white you are; you're not going to faint, are you? It's I, Kitty—Conrade, who loves you."

He held her in his arms, and her golden head rested against his beating heart. The colour slowly returned to the sweet blanched face; for, though the tears still fell from the blue eyes, Conrade was kissing them away.

"Oh, Kitty, I love you!"

"I know. And I—don't mind—anything—now," she murmured.

He stooped his tall head and caught the murmur, and for one blissful moment he forgot everything but the ardour of his own love, and the happy certainty of hers.

But his glimpse into the Paradise of first love was a very brief one; for the gates were shut by the thronging multitude of the thoughts which became between him and happiness.

He thought of his debts—of his subaltern's pay—of his life in India married to Kitty—of the children that might be born to them in their poverty—of his hopeless ambitions—and he bowed his head to hide the misery of his face. Why had he been so weak and unmanly as to declare his love to a maiden whom he could not afford to marry?

"You *knew?*"

"But oh, I wanted you to tell me!" she whispered.

"I never meant to tell you," groaned Conrade.

"You couldn't help it."

Her lovely face was flushed now, and her blue eyes shining with love and joy and triumph.

"Let us sit down—here," said Kitty; a sob sounded in her voice, though she was smiling through her tears. "I feel very funny and shaky still, Conrade. I think I must have been very near fainting. I never did such a thing before."

There were stacks of cut brushwood in the cleared space of the woods where they stood. She sank upon the nearest, and Conrade, sitting beside her, put his arm round her, so that she leant against him still.

"About those letters?" she murmured.

"Don't talk about that." Conrade frowned.

"But I must just say—it was three years ago—that I wrote them," she whispered shamefacedly.

"Why, you were a baby."

"And I didn't mean a word. It was just—idleness—or fun—and curiosity. It makes me so miserable to think I could ever have been so silly. There has never been any one but you—*really*," gasped Kitty, "you *do* forgive me?"

"Of course I forgive you. And I heard what he said."

"From the minute I saw you," she said, still leaning restfully against him, "I knew it was *you*, and I knew why you didn't tell me."

"It was because I was wise," said Conrade, sadly.

"No, you were not wise. It is I who am wise," said Kitty. "There is such a difference between being wise and clever. I don't know how to express it, but there is. You are clever, but you are not wise; and I am wise, though I am not in the least clever. It would have been foolish of you to go off to India without telling me, because I should have fretted and fretted till I made myself ill,—and the next thing you would have heard I was dead."

"Oh, Kitty, God forbid!"

"But you would. Though, now I come to think of it, that does not sound as if I were very wise after all." She laughed faintly. "But I can't help being delicate, and all my life I have been easily made ill when I was unhappy. I had congestion of the lungs when I was a little girl, but I shouldn't have been nearly so ill if I hadn't been so miserable and so afraid of going to school. I got well directly I went to live with grandpapa. And I shall never be unhappy any more now that you have told me you love me. It makes the world seem quite different and full of happiness."

"A very empty happiness," said Conrade, bitterly, "to be loved by a pauper. What have I got to offer you, Kitty? Nothing in the world. Do you know what I have? My pay, and a beggarly allowance of a hundred a year, which my uncle will as likely as not cut off if I tell him I am going to marry you."

"But you're *not* going to marry me," said Kitty.

He looked at her, surprised.

"I told you I was wise," she said, smiling very faintly. "Oh, Conrade, I know you never meant to tell me. I

know you've tried hard not to make love to me, though—though I gave you every opportunity." She crimsoned from brow to chin. "But I'm not the baby I was a few weeks ago. I know you are clever and ambitious, and that all the little chance you have of getting on in spite of your poverty will be gone if you marry me—and *do* you think I would take advantage of a moment's madness to tie you down to that? Why, I shouldn't dream of such a thing," said Kitty. She withdrew herself from his encircling arm and looked at him proudly. "I love you, Conrade, and you love me, and we can't afford to marry each other, so we must face the situation. It will be bearable now, but it wasn't bearable while you wouldn't tell me. We shall have a day or two—of happiness, without wronging any one," she said with trembling lips, "and then—we must say good-bye to each other, and you must go to India,—and—and I must go to Alnoth, and we must both be brave and cheerful and laughing; and—and—I hope—it will be a long time before either of us will marry anybody else," said Kitty; "but that, of course, must come in the end."

This display of Kitty's wisdom,—or perhaps the tears in her blue eyes—or perhaps the allusion to Alnoth,—caused Conrade to experience a sudden revulsion of feeling.

The manliness inherent in his nature revolted against any such tame submission to fate and his uncle as would be implied by his acquiescence in Kitty's wise counsel. The boldness and the generosity of his disposition alike forbade him to take the feeble course of deserting the maiden whom he loved and who loved him. His acquired caution and coldness suddenly melted before the force of his desire to protect and maintain his own. For Conrade had been alone and lonely all his life, and the thought of Kitty dependent on him, looking up to him, belonging to him, was very sweet to him; rousing all his strongly

combative instincts, and inclining him to take the risks, and fight the world for her sake.

He thought of the future once more, and his prospects no longer seemed so gloomy. He loved his soldiering; but he had always been aware that his talents might be more profitably exercised in other directions, if he desired to make his fortune; and that to a soldier such hope was a forlorn one indeed, be he clever and zealous as he would. The prizes were too few, and the chances too uncertain. But why was he obliged to remain in the army? Alternative schemes had often occurred to him, and been dismissed for fear of offending the relative on whom he was dependent, and who had no sympathy with his ambition. But Conrade had other friends now;—a fine record during his short career—a little sheaf of certificates gleaned,—which were in themselves proof of his ability and industry. If he had brains and wits and strength beyond the average of mankind, must he be for ever dependent upon his uncle, and obliged to scorn himself for submission to another man's caprice or kindness?

He sprang to his feet with the light of a new resolve on his brow, and though there was a smile on his lip, there was also a tear in his brown eyes as he drew Kitty reverently and tenderly into his arms.

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty, you are very wise, but you don't understand everything. How dare you suppose that I would give you up *now* to any other man in the world?"

Iron Brett rode into the stable-yard of Buscombe Villa, and the clattering of his horse's hoofs upon the round paving-stones brought out a stable-man, who touched his forehead in surprised greeting.

He knew Mr. Brett by sight, for the fame of his reported millions had spread over Domaford, and caused

his comings and his goings to be noted with admiring interest and awe.

The American dismounted, and handed the expectant lad half a sovereign.

"Tell Mr. Percy Hortopp," he said, "that I'm much obliged to him for the loan of his horse, and that I've had a pleasant ride. I'm going up to the house. Is anybody at home?"

"They're all at the flower-show, sir," said the man, apologetically. "Even most of the servants is gone, sir."

"I'll leave a message," said Mr. Brett.

He touched his cap in response to the man's salutation; walked quietly round to the front entrance and rang the bell, which resounded with a clang through the empty house.

An elderly respectable maid opened the door. She too recognized Mr. Brett, and smiled a fluttered smile. How unfortunate the millionaire should call when not one of the family was at home!

Mr. Brett handed her his card with an answering smile.

"I have called for a parcel addressed to Miss Kitty Trethewy, which Mr. Percy left on his dressing-table instead of posting it this morning. At least he thought it was the dressing-table," said Mr. Brett, cheerfully. "If you would be so kind as to look for it, I should be much obliged, and as I am going straight to Honeycott now, I will take it with me."

"With pleasure, sir," said the maid.

"I trust that young man was telling the truth," thought Iron, "for if he wasn't, I've had a very uncomfortable ride on a rough-trotting brute of a horse, and trebled my walk home, for less than nothing. Besides giving him the pleasure of a triumph. I declare if she can't find it, I'll manage, by hook or by crook, to get in and have a hunt for myself."

His fears were not justified. Mr. Hortopp had spoken the truth. The maid returned almost immediately with a little parcel tied up in brown paper. It was much smaller and lighter than Mr. Brett had expected.

He saw that it was addressed to Kitty; slipped it into his pocket, and handed a sovereign to the servant.

"I am very much obliged to you. You will be sure to give Mr. Percy Hortopp my card, and tell him that I called in person for the parcel? You might add that Miss Trethewy will get it even sooner than if he had posted it."

"I won't forget, sir," said the pleased maid, beaming gratefully upon him. She thought she had never seen a pleasanter smile than the one the American gentleman bestowed upon her as he went away.

Neither the magnificence of the entertainment nor the *empressement* of the host could make the dinner-party at Monksbere an altogether friendly or convivial entertainment.

The dulness and apathy of Lady Domaford cast a gloom over one end of the table, that all the smiling efforts of her lord at the other could not disperse.

She would have been willing to please her more important neighbours had she known how to do so; but as she had long ceased any attempt to make herself agreeable to her surroundings, she was out of practice in civility. Her manner was no longer under her control. She could only be arrogant or indifferent. Those of her guests who had known her during the humbler days of her spinsterhood said to each other that it was incredible that marriage with a rich vulgarian should have changed poor Virginia so much. It was certainly hard upon Lord Domaford, who tried to please everybody, that his wife's deterioration in breeding should be placed to his account.

Thus she offended her guests without knowing why;

and being unafflicted by any acuteness of perception, did not observe that the dinner-party was less successful than the informal luncheon in the tent, and that the carefully reported speeches lacked heartiness and spontaneity.

"How thankful I shall be when it's all over," growled Odo to Conrade, as the party trooped into the ball-room, where the guests were already beginning to assemble, and where the band was playing in the conservatory.

"Oh, I don't know. 'Gather ye roses while ye may,'" said Conrade, and he went forward to greet the party from Southerleigh and Honeycott, who had driven over together in an omnibus thoughtfully provided by Mr. Silas Brett.

Lady Domaford greeted Rosaleen and Kitty with marked coldness—was a little more civil to Charlotte,—and smiled as graciously as she knew how upon Miss Zoe Brett, as a possible future duchess.

Miss Zoe wore the prettiest dress in the room, and was all white and silver, with a string of pearls twisted in her brown hair, of such size and lustre that scarcely any one in the room but her father, who had paid for them, supposed them to be real.

Lord Domaford hurried about with a scribbled sheet of paper, to which he constantly referred; darting across the ball-room at intervals, to greet one person or direct another, or to whisper fresh instructions to the leader of the orchestra.

In the midst of his excitement a small note was put into his hand, marked urgent.

He opened and read it mechanically—

"*Would you mind telling me in confidence the outside limit of the price you would be willing to pay for the Southerleigh estate beyond actual value as we estimate it. Write figures on back of this sufficient.*

"*JAMES LUXTON.*"

Lord Domaford's eyes sparkled.

"Is it possible," he thought to himself, "that my suggestion has borne fruit already?" He did not hesitate for a moment. The exact value of Southerleigh had been calculated by him to a nicety many times over; and the amount beyond that value which he was willing to sacrifice as for the purchase of accommodation land, considered. Though he was eager to purchase, he was yet also a careful man, and the figures he scribbled on the blank page of Mr. Luxton's letter did not represent any reckless or extravagant total.

The September night was very warm, and the long French windows were open on to the stone-flagged terrace, ornamented by orange-trees in tubs, and by flights of white marble steps leading to the park below. Here was a crowd assembled, for fireworks were to be let off in the course of the evening.

The hero of the occasion, in deference to his father's express commands, led off the first dance with Lady Grace Trumoin, and the circumstance gave rise to as many conjectures and reports as Lord Domaford could have desired, though it was fortunate for his peace of mind that he could not hear the conversation between the couple as they danced.

"I will let you rest now, Mr. Copp. I know too well how much you hate dancing."

"That is a civil way of telling me I dance very badly," said Odo; "so I do. One comfort is that I have flatly refused to lead the cotillon."

"I suppose I was destined to assist you over that too? Really, they are almost *too* obvious."

"What does it matter? It amuses them and it doesn't hurt us," said Odo.

"It is growing rather embarrassing for me," said Lady Grace, with a pout that was out of character upon her shrewd and decided face.

"Never mind; it will soon be over," said Odo, soothingly.

"Thank you. A neat reminder of my departure to-morrow."

"Bosh, you know I didn't mean that. I can't make civil speeches; but you know it's been ripping, your being here and all that," said Odo, awkwardly.

"And don't you think I've been a most excellent and unselfish gooseberry?"

"You've been an all-round angel," he hastened to assure her; but even as he spoke she perceived his eyes wandering in search of that tiny pearl-crowned fairy in white and silver.

"What idiots men are when they're in love," Lady Grace thought drearily to herself. Though she rattled away heroically, and laughed gaily and incessantly throughout the evening, and when she led the cotillon with Conrade, she was at heart sad and despondent as she reflected that the summer, and the foolish dreaming she had indulged, and the hopes of her mother, had all come to an end.

"Let us go away by the first train to-morrow morning, mamma," she had said to her parent that afternoon. "We have stayed here too long already; and Lord Domaford's smiles and his schemes and his plots are getting on my nerves. It would be enough to choke any one off."

When her daughter spoke thus, Lady Magloire knew that she meant all hope was over of the proposed alliance between herself and Odo; but she courageously concealed her feelings, and expressed her perfect willingness to hasten her departure from Monksbere.

"I do not know that I have ever been more cruelly bored in my life," she said. "Of course I was glad to stay whilst you were enjoying all these picnics and expeditions, darling; but if you are tired of it all, I can only say I shall be exceedingly thankful to be off. Another week of Lady Domaford would have driven me mad. She is really not human. I quite look forward to Scotland, and the society of rational people."

Kitty and Lord Kerswell stood together in the darkness, upon the terrace, watching the rockets as they shot upwards on their hissing course, and broke into showers of gold and silver and coloured rain.

"This is good-bye, Kitty, for I shall be off to-morrow morning. You'll write and tell me when it's all settled, won't you, so that I can write and congratulate old Conrade?"

"Oh, Tommy, it's settled now. Conrade is coming over to ask grandpapa's consent in the morning. I feel very—very selfish; as though I were destroying all his prospects," said Kitty, wistfully.

"Nonsense; you'll inspire him to get on in the world like anything. Will he chuck soldiering?"

"I'm afraid he must."

"I'll make my father pull the wires all he knows; he's got a bit of influence," said Tommy, soothingly. "He'll find him a post by hook or by crook. Only don't breathe a word to Conrade; you know what a fellow he is for taking the hump."

"Oh, Tommy, you're very good. I feel—I feel—I don't know what I feel," said Kitty.

"You feel you're going to be the happiest girl in the world," said Tommy, steadily, "and I'm very glad of it. And you and I are friends for life, Kitty. Put your little hand in mine and say 'Good-bye, Tommy, good luck, and

God bless you,' and then we'll toddle back to the ball-room again before you catch cold in that diaphanous gown."

Kitty did as he desired.

"Good-bye, Tommy, good luck, and God bless you," she said, with a sound that was almost like a sob.

The dawn was already breaking when Rosaleen and Kitty crept together up the creaking oak staircase of the little manor house, to their white attic under the thatch.

The sleepy chirp of the birds resounded, and through the dimity curtains of the low window the light of morning, faintly shining, shamed the yellow flame of the candle by which they divested themselves of their finery.

When they had laid each a tired head upon a little hard pillow, they were yet too excited to sleep at once.

"We will never have any more secrets from each other as long as we live, Rosaleen," said Kitty.

"Never, never. I have been longing to tell you about Iron for days and days, but he said not till you asked."

"And I was too unhappy to ask. But to-night I could not help seeing. Even Conrade saw, and he is very glad, for he likes Mr. Brett. Oh, Rosaleen, I wonder what *bon papa* will say?"

"Iron says it will be all right, and he knows *bon papa* better than any one," said Rosaleen, serenely. "Oh, Kitty, I am glad it is Conrade; I was a little afraid it would be Tommy."

"It could never have been any one but Conrade," said Kitty, forgetful of her worldly wisdom. "Tommy is going to make the Duke find Conrade a post, only I am not to tell, because Conrade might be offended. If he does, perhaps Conrade won't have to go to India—after all."

"It is very noble of Tommy," said Rosaleen.

"Yes, he is very noble, though he doesn't look it," said Kitty.

"Looks don't matter in a man," said Rosaleen.

Kitty was about to offer an indignant denial, but she remembered that Mr. Brett was not so handsome as Conrade, and generously refrained.

"They are important to a man who has to make his way in the world. Oh, Rosaleen, I am almost glad that Conrade and I will be poor. I am so *exactly* fitted to marry a poor man. I can cook, and I can sew, and I can make my own clothes. They talk of love flying out of the window when poverty comes in at the door. I am certain that is only because the wife can't make her house comfortable *herself*, and has to depend on some poor little ignorant servant. How *sensible* of *bon papa* to bring us up like this. Conrade is going to work with all his might till he makes some money; and he has promised to come for me directly he can afford the tiniest little home. He talks of hardships, but that is because he has been brought up so extravagantly. He has no idea how comfortable I shall make him." She laughed ecstatically. "You see, Rosaleen, how everything turns out for the best. You've never been as fond of household things as I have, *really;* and now you'll be able to afford to make your mud-pies from morning till night, as Mr. Brett is so very rich."

"Oh, Kitty, I couldn't bear to be rich if you were poor. But, however, that will be all right, for we will share everything," said Rosaleen, calmly.

"No, we won't," said Kitty. "Not that I should mind, but Conrade would be too proud. He couldn't."

"Well, we shan't be rich long," said Rosaleen, as if the reflection comforted her, "for Iron means to give his money away as fast as he makes it. Oh, Kitty, do you

know that I have told him *everything*; even my great—great idea?"

"What great idea?"

"Oh, Kitty!"

"Well, you have so many great ideas," said Kitty, apologetically, "you must forgive me if I mix them up. *My* ideas will have to be very small now," she said, reverting happily to her own fate. "And yet, I don't know, for Conrade is so clever he is sure to get on."

Rosaleen reflected with thankfulness on the superiority of Iron Brett to her sister as a confidante on serious subjects.

"The only thing that makes me anxious is the leaving *bon papa*," she said, "for Iron wants—*it*—to be at once, and to take me to America directly *bon papa* gives his consent."

"Well, you needn't be anxious yet, for I shall be here for the present. We shall have to wait a long, long time, perhaps a year or two, before Conrade and I can be married," said Kitty, promptly. "Oh, Rosaleen, perhaps *bon papa* will be able to squeeze a little, little *dot* for me out of the little mine in Spain; or do you think it all went in our London trip?"

"I don't know; but there is our mother's *dot*," said Rosaleen, considering, "that has *got* to be divided between us when we are one and twenty, and I will give you my share, Kitty. You *couldn't* mind that."

"Of course I couldn't. On the contrary, I am delighted to accept it, and thank you very much," said Kitty, beaming from her pillow. "Every little helps, and you won't want it now. Oh, Rosaleen, I am *too* happy."

"Then you'd better go to sleep," said the wise elder, "for to-morrow will be a very exciting day, and we mustn't over-sleep ourselves."

"I don't suppose Conrade will be here much before twelve at the earliest," said Kitty, "for they don't breakfast till ten at Monksbere, and he said he would have to help to see all the people off before he could come away. But directly he has been, Rosaleen, I must fly over and tell Zoe, for she is pining to know."

"Charlotte is going to drive Zoe and her father into Domaford to-morrow, directly after breakfast," said Rosaleen; "she said she had important business to attend to. That means she is going to worry poor Mr. Luxton about something. And Iron is going too. He says he wants to buy you a wedding present. I told him how little choice there was in Domaford, and begged him to wait till he got to London, but he said he was in a hurry to be the first, and was sure to find some little thing that you would like, just to start with."

"It is very kind of him. He was the first to congratulate me too," said Kitty, much gratified. "I shall never forget that, nor that it was *he* who got me back those hateful letters. Oh, Rosaleen, how *could* I have ever been so silly?"

"Never mind, you were young," said Rosaleen, consolingly. "One is apt to be foolish when one is young."

"Folly and I have shaken hands for ever," said Kitty; and with a sigh of happiness she fell suddenly asleep.

CHAPTER XXIII

LORD DOMAFORD was seated in his favourite chair before the writing-table in his study, and his son Odo faced him, looking flushed and surly, and yet somewhat inclined to laugh.

"I must say that I fail to understand your meaning," said Lord Domaford, fussily. "Here have your mother and I been for weeks entertaining a most charming and delightful young lady whom we should have been only too glad to welcome into our family. She has paid us a long visit—a very long visit"—he could not help a sigh of relief when he remembered that he would not have to take Lady Magloire in to dinner again for the present—"and you have paid her a great deal of attention——"

"No, I haven't, father," interrupted Odo. "Be fair; it was you who paid her the attention."

"But she must have understood that your intentions——"

"She quite understood that I hadn't any intentions at all. I don't care twopence for Lady Grace."

"Then why didn't you say so before," said Lord Domaford, becoming for a moment more natural, and giving vent to his annoyance by the sharpness of his tone. "You let me suppose that all was going on as I wished."

"I couldn't help what you supposed. And if I didn't make myself as disagreeable as usual over it," growled Odo, "it was because we were all enjoying ourselves for once;

if I'd told you what I felt about Lady Grace, there'd have been a row as usual. My mother was only civil to Zoe because she thought Kerswell was going to marry her. If she'd known *I* was in love with her, she would never have been civil to her at all."

"Then I am to understand that, having failed to secure Lord Kerswell, this American young person has turned her attention to you?" said Lord Domaford, angrily.

"Stop a bit," said Odo, turning red. "We won't talk about young persons, and things of that kind, when we're talking of Zoe. I'll have her mentioned with respect even by my own father."

"I see no particular reason for mentioning her with respect," said Lord Domaford. "She is reputed to be very rich; but that would not affect my opinion one way or the other. I am not a worshipper of Mammon. I do not ask for money—with my son's wife."

He leant back and surveyed Odo with a satisfied face.

His son's critical and gloomy disapproval often irritated Lord Domaford, but here was a sentiment that even the unworldly Odo must approve.

"No, you're all for the other thing—I know that," said his stolid son, unimpressed. "You want me to give the family a leg up, so to speak, by marrying a woman with a handle to her name, and so forth. Well, I'm sorry, but I can't do it. I prefer to marry one of my own equals. Not that I pretend to be the equal of Zoe, for God knows I'm not."

"Your equals!" said Lord Domaford, almost with tears in his eyes. "Do you remember who your father is, boy? How can you expect me to look upon these people as my equals?"

"I *don't* expect you to," said Odo, calmly. "You've got your ideas, I've got mine. They've got theirs. You

think Lady Grace Trumoin my equal; but what do you suppose old Magloire thinks? He knows who we were—honest yeomen, and so forth. Nothing to be ashamed of either. And he knows you've got your peerage by spending your money and voting straight—services to your country and all that—*you* know—but as for thinking the Copps the equals of the Trumoins——! But he'd be willing to let her marry me because of your money, and so would the Duke be willing to let Tommy marry Zoe if she'd have him. After that, all this talk about equals is silly rot to me," said Odo, with great frankness. "Old Silas Brett is as good as we are. His father and mother were plain, hard-working people, and so were your father and mother. He's made his own way, and you've made yours. What's the difference? Except that he's made a lot more money than you have, if it comes to that. Do you think old Silas thinks *me* good enough for Zoe? Not he, and he's quite right. He knows she's pretty enough, and clever enough, and well-mannered enough, to fill the highest position a man could offer a woman."

"I have no desire to continue this discussion," said Lord Domaford, breathing hard with indignation, "in which I consider you have adopted a most improper tone."

"It's not my fault. I never mean to be uncivil to start with," cried Odo, "but you drive me to it. I came to ask you a plain question, and I wanted a plain answer; and instead of giving me one you begin about my position, and Lady Grace, and a thousand other things."

"There is no immediate hurry for any decision on my part," said Lord Domaford, regaining his self-control as he perceived his son to be growing angry in turn. "I am willing to temporize. We will say no more about Lady Grace for the present. Later on I will reopen the subject."

"That's how you put me off about going to school;

and cramming for the army, and—and everything," said Odo, fiercely; "that's how you put everybody off; smiling and saying Temporize, Temporize. I know your ways, father. You think you get over them all in the end. And so you may; but not over me any more. A man's a right to choose his own wife, and I've chosen Zoe. Will you consent to my marrying her—yes or no?"

"Then *no*," said Lord Domaford, irritated out of his usual equanimity. "I will never give my consent to any such thing. I refuse it altogether. I won't hear of my only son marrying a nobody, whether she be an English pauper or an American heiress."

Odo grew suddenly calm; his brow lightened; an expression of relief overspread his face.

"Then that's all right. We know where we are," he remarked. "I told old Silas so, and he wouldn't believe me. You see it's been the other way about so far. People of more importance than you and me have been rather anxious to ally themselves with the Brett family. And of course, when he heard you hold forth in your speech yesterday about wanting me to marry the lady *of my choice* as soon as possible, and all that, he was more confirmed in his impression than ever. Of course *I* knew it was all bunkum, and you were really talking about Lady Grace all the time, but *he* didn't," said Odo. "But now I am justified."

"What do you mean by all this, sir?" thundered Lord Domaford.

"I mean," said Odo, slowly, "that as I was certain you would never give your consent to my marrying Zoe, I saw no use in wasting time, and squabbling all round, and making every one miserable to no good end—by asking for it. So I married her in Domaford this morning."

The shock was so great that Lord Domaford could not

speak for some moments. Odo considerately walked away to the window, and stood with his hands in his pockets, looking out.

"Is this true?" said his father, presently.

"I don't tell lies," said Odo, in surly tones. He felt some pity for his father's emotion, but he knew not how to express it save by speaking rather more gruffly than usual.

"Is it a legal marriage?"

"I got the license directly I came of age."

"She's not a British subject."

Odo smiled.

"Oddly enough she is, so far as the law of England is concerned. She happens to have been born in New Zealand. We were married before the registrar in Domaford."

"Not in church!" Lord Domaford's tone was shocked.

"My object was to settle things so that they couldn't be argued away or undone," said Odo, doggedly. "So I got Zoe to consent to be married privately. She's gone straight back to tell her mother, and I came straight to you. Of course there'll be a wedding in church; but it seemed fair to give you all the chance of coming to that if you liked."

Lord Domaford reviewed the situation rapidly. Perhaps a scandal could be avoided. He must avoid one, if possible, at all costs.

He rose from his chair.

"I must take steps," he said, half aloud. He took three, and they brought him to Odo's side, where he stopped short.

His anger had died away now that he was confronted with a solid fact, and his mind was already busy endeavouring to make the best of it.

"Does her father know yet?"

"He didn't till this morning. But just as she was

starting she went and told him, in confidence, what she meant to do. I don't know if he liked it or not. He's such an inscrutable man."

"Why didn't he come at once and tell me?" cried Lord Domaford.

"I said she told him in confidence," said Odo, grimly. "I don't know what passed between them. I only know he's always told her she should marry the man she loved, whoever he might happen to be, so her conscience was quite easy on the subject of his consent. All he did was to come with us to make sure everything was properly done. I was very glad he should, and so was she. He's the finest fellow I ever saw, and I respect him more than any other man I ever met," said Odo, simply.

Lord Domaford winced.

"Very well, Odo, what's done can't be undone," he said, falling back upon platitude. "I won't say what I think of your conduct—or of hers."

"You can say what you like about mine," observed Odo, "but if you say anything about hers——"

"Well——" said his father, sharply.

"I shall walk out of this room and not come back, sir," said Odo.

Lord Domaford looked at him, and saw that he meant what he said. It flashed across him that this American father-in-law of Odo's could make his son altogether independent of him if he chose, and he felt singularly helpless. His command of superior wealth had hitherto been a great stand-by in his dealings with men and things. Lord Domaford felt for a moment that he hated these American strangers, with their calm independence of manner, and their unlimited supplies of cash.

"This is the way our children grow up and repay us for our love," he said bitterly.

Odo drew his thick brows together in a frown.

"It depends a bit how you show your love, father," he said. "I've never meant to be a bad son to you, and I'm sorry if I'm disappointing you now. Of course I think you take an unreasonable view of the Bretts; but it's no use going into that now. As you said just now, it's done and can't be undone. That's what I meant it to be. And if you'd look on the bright side of things, I think you'll see it ain't so bad after all."

At this juncture a servant entered with a note on a salver.

"Mr. Luxton's coachman has just rode over with this from Domaford, my lord. There was no answer."

"Thank you, Frederick. Be sure the messenger is offered refreshment, Frederick," said Lord Domaford, in his most urbane manner.

As the servant shut the door he opened the note.

Private and confidential.

My dear Lord Domaford,

I received your message last night, and thought the price you mentioned you would be willing to give for the Southerleigh estate an exceedingly fair one; but I have had an offer of nearly double the amount this morning from another purchaser; which I have naturally been obliged to place before my client, and with which she has immediately closed. The purchaser is Mr. Brett.

Yours very truly,

JAMES LUXTON.

Lord Domaford's first feeling of annoyance was succeeded by one of pleasure.

Then the Southerleigh estate would come into his family

after all: and without any expense to himself. Perhaps there was, as Odo said, a bright side to the marriage.

Hitherto his disappointment had swallowed up all other considerations. Now his business instincts triumphed over his defeated ambitions. He began to feel some curiosity concerning the amount of Miss Brett's fortune.

"Well, Odo," he said, "I don't want to be harsh, though you have acted in every way against my wishes. It is my desire that everything should be smooth and peaceful; and you are—my only son," said Lord Domaford, with pathos. "I cannot quarrel with you. I must, of course, break this news as gently as possible to your mother, and consult her about the wedding. In our position this cannot be a hole-and-corner affair. She may be willing even to have it here."

"Thank you, father," said Odo, "but the Bretts wouldn't be willing. It's to be in London. Very quietly, Zoe promised me that; she knows how I hate display; and as she won't leave her parents till she's got her trousseau and a whole lot of things, it won't be till the middle of October, I'm afraid."

"She seems to be in no hurry," said Lord Domaford, rather angrily.

"No, she's in no hurry," said Odo, cheerfully, "but anyway it's all right, thank Heaven; there's no going back on one thing—she's my wife."

"Do you know—have you asked—that is, did Mr. Brett happen to mention what kind of a dowry he meant to bestow on his daughter?" said Lord Domaford, in a tone of elaborate unconsciousness.

"Yes, he did," said Odo, reluctantly. "Coming back from Domaford just now, he said he meant to give her a million."

"Pounds or dollars?" gasped Lord Domaford.

"I really didn't think of asking, sir," said Odo.

Before Lord Domaford had recovered from the effects of this interview, and before, indeed, he had time to communicate the results to his wife, his nephew Conrade came to seek him out.

"I won't detain you long, uncle, if you are in a hurry. But it is important, at least to me."

"Very well, I will give you five minutes. What is it?"

"I proposed to Kitty Trethewy yesterday," said Conrade, going straight to the point.

"What do you intend to live on?" said Lord Domaford.

"That is what I have come to consult you about," said Conrade, steadily. "I am aware that I have no right to expect anything more from you, uncle." He paused imperceptibly, but Lord Domaford made no sign. "You paid my debts once," said Conrade, and his tone was rather bitter, "and you gave me to understand that it would be for the last time."

"Am I to infer that you are in debt again?"

"Of course I am in debt," said Conrade. "It's no use going into details; but a fellow can't live on a hundred a year and his pay, without getting into debt; or at least *I* can't."

"A hundred a year is a great deal of money," said Lord Domaford, sharply.

"It depends how you look at it; and it depends how you've been brought up," said Conrade, easily. "However, my debts are no great matter; at all events, there's nothing I mean to trouble *you* about. But before I go to see M. de Nauroy this morning, I thought I ought to let you know. You have stood—more or less—in the place of a father to me, and I hope not to forget it; though sometimes, uncle"—a flash of Conrade's fiery spirit shone for a

moment in his dark eyes—"you've made it uncommonly hard for me to remember it. But at all events, you brought me up and educated me; and I hope—I've done my best—not to abuse your kindness, by neglecting any opportunity you gave me——"

It was very hard for Conrade, but he forced himself to say this, though Lord Domaford gave him no assistance.

"Of course I shall have to leave the army," said Conrade, and his voice was unsteady, for he was young still, and could not entirely hide his feelings. "It's a blow, in a way, for I love soldiering; and I've got on to a certain extent. But I needn't trouble you with my personal feelings. The one thing that is certain is that I couldn't keep a wife—as I am now."

"What do you propose to do?"

Lord Domaford was angry. He had been opposed by Odo, and had been vanquished by him, and obliged to swallow his indignation. The present situation offered a tempting opportunity of displaying his authority over somebody else. Conrade, at least, was dependent on him still.

"I propose to find out exactly where I stand," said Conrade.

The poor boy made a valiant effort to subdue the haughty spirit which burned within him, and made him long to defy his uncle, and spurn his assistance instead of asking for it.

"Oh, Kitty, Kitty," he thought, "it is very bitter to eat humble pie—even for your sake."

"If you will—give me some kind of an allowance to go on with, for the moment," he faltered. "I have friends—in London and elsewhere—who will, I am certain, help me to get a post of some kind where I can hope to make my way, and before long be independent of your assistance altogether; with a prospect of making my own fortune.

But, of course, this can't be found in a day; and meantime I must have something to live on."

"And if I refuse——"

"In that case I suppose I must place myself under a fresh obligation to some one else," said Conrade, bitterly.

There was a moment's pause; and then, with the touch of grace that was as natural to his disposition as it was foreign to Odo's, Conrade said—

"I would rather it had been you, uncle."

This one little impetuous sentence, uttered without *arrière pensée* of any kind, served Conrade better than a torrent of reproaches or argument.

Lord Domaford's heart was softened. His vanity was soothed by the reflection that his nephew preferred to appeal to him, rather than ask the Duke his cousin, who had shown him such singular favour, for assistance.

"You young men seem to me to think of nothing but your own wishes from morning till night," he said; it was a relief, at least, to be able to complain to some one.

Lord Domaford seldom complained, but bore his wife's inanities and his son's perpetual disapproval with a smiling countenance. "You don't know, Conrade, what a disappointment you can be to your elders. Here's Odo, married to Zoe Brett——"

"Married!" said Conrade, with a start; and he suppressed a laugh.

"Married clandestinely this morning in Domaford."

"Is that what he went for?"

"That is what he went for. I am glad to see that you, at least, know nothing of it," said Lord Domaford. His tone relented. "It is a great blow to me, Conrade."

"I really don't see why it should be, uncle," said Conrade, but his tone was sympathetic. "She's a very nice girl; and she'll have millions of money."

"I don't care for money," said Lord Domaford; but he reddened slightly when he remembered that he had just told his nephew that he considered a hundred a year a great deal of money.

"And she'll make Odo do lots of things that you would never be able to make him do," said Conrade. "She's a most determined little party."

"She will never make him go into Parliament."

"Well, why should he?" said Conrade. "You've been through the mill for him, and got him a peerage; and she'll see that he fills his position as he should, and drag him into society, and teach him to like it."

"Odo hates society. He won't be decently civil to my friends. You saw how he behaved this morning, rushing away to get married, instead of taking leave of Lady Grace and her mother, or anybody else, as he should," groaned Lord Domaford.

"But *she* will be decently civil to everybody, and she will make him the same. I give her a year," cried Conrade, "to become the most popular hostess in London. Pretty Americans are all the rage, and she's as clever as she's pretty, and as good as she's clever. She's the very wife for Odo. She'll take him yachting and get him into the Squadron."

"Do you really think so, Conrade?" said Lord Domaford.

If this were so, he might be able to rest, and devote himself to his orchid houses, and to the improvement of his estate. Energetic as he was, the task of towing Lady Domaford through the mazes of the London season was a heavy one, and he sometimes tired of it.

Lord Domaford suddenly recollected Zoe as she had appeared last night, a little dancing, dainty vision of white and silver. Everybody in the room was talking of the

American heiress. It had annoyed him at the time, but he felt differently now. Perhaps it would be the same in London. Now he came to think of it, it *had* been the same.

Lord Domaford began to be consoled. He would make the best of it to his wife; and perhaps he had better lose no time in showing civility to the young lady herself, if she were leaving Southerleigh for London.

"If you'll wait a moment, while I speak to your aunt, I'll walk over to Southerleigh with you," he said to Conrade.

"Odo is waiting for me, sir; we were driving over together in the dog-cart."

"Then he can drive me over too. That will be better still. I suppose I'd better go and see—the Bretts," said Lord Domaford, "to show there's no nasty feeling. The less that is said about this registrar affair the better. I can't doubt that it wouldn't bear looking into. There must be informality somewhere. The wedding will, of course, be celebrated properly in town." He jumped up, rubbing his hands. "You are right, my dear boy, quite right. We must make the best of it," he said, and the usual suavity of his manner returned.

But he perceived that Conrade seemed to be waiting, as though expectant of something further. The recollection of his nephew's affairs, so unimportant in comparison with Odo's, returned upon him once more.

"And as regards your own—entanglement, Conrade, why, I can't but look upon it as an imprudence—a very great imprudence, considering how poor your prospects are. Miss Fish would have been in many ways more suitable." Then he remembered that since Southerleigh was sold he had no further personal interest in the marriage of Miss Fish. "Still, we have known little Kitty all her life, and

she is a nice little girl, and very pretty; the Duchess took an immense fancy to her, and asked her to Alnoth. I have nothing to say against Kitty Trethewy, except that she is too young."

"That is a fault that time will mend," said Conrade, reflecting that he must make allowance for the prejudices of a man who had chosen a bride of five-and-thirty.

"Just so, just so. But it should cause delay, which is a good thing. And her ideas must be very small, which is another good thing," said Lord Domaford, benevolently; "so if yours are, as they should be, the same—why, the Duke was saying to me only the other day that he had a high opinion of your talents—it seems a pity that you should talk of leaving the army just as you are getting on so well."

"If I could afford to marry, and stay in the army, uncle, I haven't the slightest desire to leave it," said Conrade, whose impatience made his uncle's hesitations seem almost intolerable.

"Exactly, exactly. That is what I am coming to. You had better talk it over with the Vicomte, and find out what is the least he would consider necessary. I dare say he would be quite satisfied if I promised to increase your allowance by a hundred or two—say three hundred," said Lord Domaford, warming to his work as he proceeded. "He must have some little savings of his own put by; perhaps he would make a settlement; and if so, I should be very willing to meet him. You may tell him so with my compliments. And—and you have been a good lad, Conrade, and done me credit on the whole—great credit; I wish you every happiness," said Lord Domaford, holding out his hand to his nephew.

The morning was clear and brilliant, the white clouds

blew brightly across a dazzling sky, the robins sang loudly, and Chéri-Mignon dozed in the sun.

In the garden the Vicomte worked at his planting; there was a rose tree to be set, the gift of a humble neighbour, with whom he exchanged cuttings and bulbs, for of money transactions he had few; the carpet of pinks and forget-me-nots, now running wild beneath the attenuated ghosts of their dead flowers, to be thinned; the rank growth of his beloved nasturtiums to be cleared away.

From time to time he gave directions to Johnny, who was working among the lean ragged stems of the yellowing cabbages, and digging up beet and carrot to be stored for winter use.

Rosaleen and Kitty, in spite of their resolves to the contrary, had overslept themselves.

The Vicomte walked on tiptoe beneath the window in great anxiety that they should not be disturbed.

"Kitty, Kitty! It is past eleven o'clock. Conrade might really be here by the time you are dressed. And there is *bon papa* working in the garden as though nothing had happened."

Kitty knelt on the low window-seat, and thrusting her golden head forth into the fresh morning air, acquainted her grandfather with the interesting fact that she was awake.

"And we shall be down directly, *bon papa*. Pélagie has brought us our coffee. We had no idea it was so late."

"Hast thou slept well, my pigeon?" cried the Vicomte, tenderly.

"Too well," said Kitty, gaily. "Oh, Rosaleen, let us make haste down. At least I might just tell him that Conrade is coming. But I suppose it would only agitate him, and he was so pleased with poor Tommy for going to *him;* it is better to humour him. This will make up for his disappointment about Tommy, I hope. I shall never

forget his dismay, when I went in and found him all ready to give me his blessing, and I was obliged to tell him there was nothing to bless me for, as I had refused Tommy. I must just wait patiently, I suppose, till I see Conrade coming up the garden path."

But when the sudden opening of the green door presently made Kitty's heart jump, it was Charlotte and not Conrade who appeared, and who came hurrying up the garden path, anxious to lose not a moment in imparting her news.

She came upstairs to seek Rosaleen and Kitty in their little green parlour, where they were enjoying the morning coffee and rolls.

"Zoe married! Oh, Charlotte, it is impossible! You have misunderstood something or somebody."

"That is always the way when I tell news," said Charlotte, aggrieved. "I am invariably accused of muddling or exaggeration. Come over and see for yourself, if you don't believe me. Ma is furious. She says it's not respectable to be married in a registry office; and keeps talking as though it must be my fault. Me! who knew nothing about it. Turning it all over in my mind, I can't help thinking Lord Domaford's civility yesterday meant that he hoped Odo would marry *me*. However, *this* settles *that*. Not that I should have looked at Odo with so much as a pair of tongs. What Zoe sees in him I cannot think. She goes on about his honesty till I get quite angry. I hope none of us are thieves, as I tell her. I must say I shall be very thankful when to-morrow comes and they all go away."

"I believe there is a Chinese proverb which says, 'when the guest is gone the host is glad,'" said Rosaleen, smiling.

"And a very sensible proverb too. It is just saying what we all feel."

"Speak for yourself," cried Kitty, indignantly. "I shall be broken-hearted."

"It is all very well for you, but *I* am disappointed in Zoe. For days she has scarcely spoken to me, and now she gets married without even telling me. I should never have allowed such a thing in my house."

"Perhaps that is why she did not tell you."

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when I came out of James Luxton's office, full of important business, as you may suppose, after being in there nearly an hour and a half, and expecting, of course, to find them waiting in the waggonette outside, as I had left them."

"For an hour and a half!"

"Of course I had no idea I should have been so long. Time flies when one is busy. And instead they actually kept *me* waiting. And Zoe flying and kissing me *in the street*. I did not know which way to look. And Odo as red as a lobster, whom I never expected to see at all, wanting to drive her back in his dog-cart. And old Silas going off into fits of laughter without saying a word. I can assure you it was a regular Punch and Judy Show."

"And Iron Brett?"

"He behaved very differently. I couldn't tell whether he knew, for he has such a funny way one never can tell. But he never left me for a moment. He was with me, of course, all the time, as the business in James Luxton's office—however, I promised not to say a word about it," said Charlotte, suddenly recollecting herself, "so don't please try to pump me any more——"

"Really, Charlotte," began Kitty, indignantly; but she forgot her indignation when she heard the click of the green door once more.

"There is Iron Brett! I declare I was only just in time," said Charlotte, "or it would have been him to tell instead of me. I don't see why he should try and forestall me in this way. But, however, it does not signify now, for

you know all about it, and there it is, Odo is married. And I can't stop. I'll just explain to your grandpa *why* I dashed in like this, and then cut across the kitchen garden home."

And in a moment the active Charlotte was downstairs and in the garden, communicating her news to the astonished Vicomte; and incidentally to Johnny, who paused, gaping among the cabbages.

"I haven't told one word of our secret to a soul, Mr. Brett," she cried, good-naturedly waving her hand in token of farewell; and she slammed the green door of the kitchen garden behind her, and could be heard running at a great pace over the cinder paths.

"What can she mean?" cried Kitty. "Oh, Rosaleen, shall we go down, or would it be more dignified to wait here till he comes up?"

"I think he must be going to speak to *bon papa*," said Rosaleen, alternately red and pale. "Look, they are going in together. Oh, Kitty, I am sure we had better stay up here."

"How can you be so calm?"

"I don't *feel* calm," said Rosaleen, with a tremulous smile.

"Whatever we feel we are behaving *most* appropriately. and exactly as grandpapa would wish, I should think," said Kitty; and she sat upright in the armchair, and folded her hands before her. "Like demoiselles of the *ancien régime* waiting quite unconcerned outwardly, whilst M. le Vicomte receives proper applications for his grand-daughters' hands. Rosaleen, do you think I was right to put on my blue frock this morning? It is Conrade's favourite, that is why I did it; but I like myself better in white."

Downstairs Mr. Brett made matters clear to the Vicomte, who wept and laughed as usual, as he bestowed his blessing,

together with an embrace, upon the much-enduring son of his old friend.

"And Odo is actually married. The impertinent one! It appears, then, that I was mistaken in my conclusion?"

"I believe there was a slight error, Vicomte," said Mr. Brett. "Nothing that cannot be easily rectified."

"And you will take my child to America?" cried old Patrick. "*Dieu de Dieux!*"

"That is my intention, but a little journey like that is no great matter nowadays. We'll be backwards and forwards pretty often. Now that's all settled, sir, we come to business."

"Always business," cried the Vicomte, ruefully. "It is easy to see that you are the son of your father."

"I have been given to understand that I resemble him somewhat," said Mr. Brett. "I believe it's usual on these occasions to make a suitable provision for the lady one is about to marry; and I propose, with your permission, Vicomte, to hand over to my bride my share in the Alcumund mine, which amounts to about the same as your own; just for luck, or for sentiment—what you like to call it; because it was that investment which, so to speak, brought us together."

"Good heavens!" cried the Vicomte; "but what then am I to do with my money? It lies upon my soul like a burden of sin. Am I never to get rid of it?"

"I must leave you to think out that problem for yourself, Vicomte," said Mr. Brett, seriously. "Anyway, I've a notion to ask you not to add any to *my* burden. I believe I'll have some difficulty as it is to get quit of it; even with a wife to help me along." And his grey eyes twinkled.

With his characteristic nod of friendship and understanding he then left the Vicomte, and went upstairs to seek Rosaleen in the little green parlour.

Kitty flew past him as he mounted the oak staircase.

The *ancien régime* had already palled upon her impatience.

She ran into her grandfather's study, and threw herself into his arms.

"What is it, mignonne?' cried the Vicomte, alarmed by this impetuous exhibition of her affection.

"Oh, *bon papa*, it is—it is—Conrade," she gasped. "And he is coming up the garden, looking so pale and so handsome, that if you could only see him you would be sorry, you would indeed. He is coming to ask your consent quite properly, and I didn't mean to say anything about it, but you know I never never was as well behaved as Rosaleen, *bon papa*. Promise me, *promise* me that you will say yes."

"Conrade!" said the Vicomte. "Là-là-là."

"Yes, yes; listen to him, poor angel," cried Kitty, as the unaccustomed clang of a bell pealed through the house, astonishing Pélagie. "You cannot say he is not showing proper respect, *bon papa*. He has rung the bell instead of walking in as usual. Oh, *bon papa*, he is very poor, but, thanks to you, I can *cook*," said Kitty, with a sob and a laugh. "So remember, if he says anything about that, that I don't *mind* being poor. Only promise not to send him away, or you will kill me."

She dropped a breathless kiss upon the poor Vicomte's bewildered brow, and vanished scarcely ten seconds before Conrade's tall head stooped to enter the portal of the low room.

The Vicomte was so tender-hearted that he would have felt kindly towards any young man declaring his love for one of the beloved children of his heart; but for Conrade he had, besides, an affection and sympathy, dating from his boyhood, which caused him to welcome him with open arms.

He cut short in a moment the young soldier's embarrassed references to the smallness of his means, and the kindness of his uncle, who was willing to settle what the Vicomte thought necessary.

"It needs not. We shall not trouble him, thou and I, to be concerned in our affairs," said old Patrick, realizing with a burst of thankfulness that he could now rid himself for ever of his secret, and his superfluous wealth. "Thou wilt be to me a son, Conrade, for my little one loves thee. But yes, she has told me so, with that frankness which is natural to her character; and I shall bestow upon her certainly a *dot* that will astonish her, and thine uncle, and all the world besides. The little mine in Spain permits it," said the Vicomte.

It was so great a delight to him to pull out his bank-book and exhibit the figures which haunted his conscience to Conrade, that he forgot all about Kitty; and presently she could bear the suspense no longer, but crept in upon them, half smiling, half frightened, and altogether charming.

Conrade came forward to greet her with an emotion that became him very well, and her grandfather dropped his papers, and his glass, and held out his arms to her.

"Come here, my angel, and let me embrace thee, for I have given my consent to thy marriage with this excellent and amiable young man. Thus I lose both my little ones. It is fate," said the Vicomte, with emotion. "It is certainly not for me to grudge their happiness. Behold me solitary—whilst they cross the ocean to America, and to India."

"Oh, *bon papa*, there will be no need for us to go to India now," said Kitty, between laughing and crying. "We can stay with you for ever and ever, and Conrade can go into Parliament, or do anything he likes, for—for—

Charlotte has sold Southerleigh—the house and the land—to Iron Brett this morning; and he says it is his and Rosaleen's wedding-present to Conrade and me."

Lord Domaford found himself the centre of a family group in the drawing-room at Southerleigh. It was a situation which afforded unlimited opportunity for the display of tact and politeness combined, and he felt himself thoroughly equal to the occasion.

"I am a plain man, Mr.—er—Brett," he said, grasping the hand of Odo's father-in-law, "and I will not attempt to deny that for a moment I was—taken by surprise, offended if I may say so, that my son should withdraw his confidence from me at such a time. But when I heard his frank and manly avowal of his love for your daughter—when I reflected that, after all, he was but carrying out (though somewhat too precipitately) the very wishes I expressed so warmly in my speech of yesterday (which, I need hardly tell you, was perfectly sincere), I could not but forgive him. I lose not a moment in coming to assure you personally of this fact. I could wish the affair had been differently conducted. A man in my position—the cynosure of so many eyes, exposed to so much public criticism—could hardly feel otherwise. But the mere knowledge of your presence there, the certainty that you would see that all was done in order—so far as a marriage of this kind can be said to be in order—was a relief to my mind. I can only express my wish, and I trust that it will not be disregarded, that a regular wedding shall follow this—er—informal compact, with as little delay as possible."

Mr. Silas Brett wore a very queer expression throughout this speech, to which he listened with the utmost politeness and attention.

"Well, sir, the whole thing was done somewhat in a

hurry," he said slowly, "and, as a rule, I don't approve of things done in a hurry. Your son is of age, and he and my daughter had fixed up matters between them without intending to ask anybody's leave. But when it came to the point my little girl couldn't bring herself to act so without her old father's knowledge. So they took me along. Whether it was all done in order, as you say, or not"—old Silas smiled inscrutably—"don't signify much, since we're pledged to have the ceremony in London as soon as I can get the details fixed up, and as soon as Zoe can get her trousseau and a few other little odds and ends, without which I've a notion she wouldn't care to quit. I'm rather afraid your son will have to wait quite a spell for her yet."

Mrs. Silas occupied the sofa, where she sat, clasping her daughter's hand, and laughing and crying alternately.

"You must forgive me, Lord Domaford, but I've been just like this ever since Zoe came back. She always declared she'd follow my example. When I ran away from boarding-school, Lord Domaford, to be married clandestinely to Mr. Brett, I was only sixteen years of age. His father was downright mad with Silas, but directly I went in, he put one hand on each side of my face, so, and kissed me on the forehead, and said, 'Now I've *seen* you, I forgive him, my dear,' and I thought it was perfectly elegant of him. We were the best of friends after that. The fact is, he never could be anything but gentle with a woman; and Silas and John are just like him. And I don't know but my nephew Iron is the same. Wasn't it like Zoe to go and tell her father at the last moment? She never could keep anything from him. I declare I almost fell off this sofa when Silas walked in and introduced the Honourable Mrs. Odo Copp to me."

"I don't know how I'm going to live without my little

girl," said old Silas, as though he had forgotten Lord Domaford's presence altogether.

"You won't have to live without me," said Zoe, and she went up and kissed her father before the surprised spectator, who was quite unaccustomed to demonstrations of this kind. "Half the time you'll be on this side with me; and half the time we'll be on the other side with you."

He shook his head and smiled.

"I guess I'll leave you to settle that with Odo," he said. "Now, Lord Domaford, I think I owe you some explanations, and if you'll be good enough to come right away to the smoking-room with me, I believe we can settle our business together more satisfactorily without any lovers around."

The business settled was so satisfactory to Lord Domaford that, though he presently learnt that it was not Mr. Silas Brett who had purchased Southerleigh, he scarcely felt any disappointment.

He had thought that the Court would be a suitable residence for Odo and his bride, and a dower-house for his Virginia, should he have the misfortune to predecease her; but when Mr. Brett mentioned the sum he proposed to settle upon his daughter now, and the amount of the fortune she would probably inherit at his death, Lord Domaford felt that a plain country house like Southerleigh was altogether unworthy of her. With the reflection that the income of his son's wife would be larger than his own, he dismissed all consideration of the Court from his mind; and even warmly acquiesced when Mr. Brett, stifling a sigh, declared that he thought it a mistake for a young couple to reside near their parents.

"I must give her up. I've always known it would come sooner or later. But if your boy makes her happy, sir," he said earnestly, "I shan't grudge her to him. Young folk have got to be happy their own way and live

their own lives. As soon as we've fixed up this wedding, they can choose a house in London to suit them, and some nice little box in the country like your own place down here, sir, and I'll buy it for them, if it's to be had for money. If they choose a home the other end of the British Isles, sir, they'll be nearer to you than they will be to me," said Mr. Brett.

"I sympathize with your feelings as a father, Mr. Brett," said Lord Domaford, grasping him once more warmly by the hand, "but believe me"—he lowered his voice, as he usually did when about to make some especially impressive or original remark—"believe me, everything that happens turns out eventually for the best, in this best of all possible worlds."

Early in the afternoon there was a tea-party at Honeycott.

The Vicomte made the coffee, and uncorked the *sirop de groseilles*, the *prunelle*, and his favourite *vin de Madère sec*; Pélagie, almost beside herself with excitement, baked *petits fours* and *quatre-quarts*; Mr. Brett ran to and fro with plates; and Conrade helped Rosaleen and Kitty to gather peaches and pears, and to ornament the dishes with the scarlet leaves of the Virginia creeper.

The entire party from Southerleigh had been invited, and all had accepted save Mrs. Trethewy.

"Thank you, I go nowhere," she said sourly, in response to the gallant entreaties of Mr. Silas Brett.

"Nevertheless, we shall hope, ma'am, to induce you later to take a trip across the Atlantic," he responded.

"I have had enough of moving about. I shall never move again, when once we have returned to Plymouth, which, I am thankful to know, will be very soon. I am content to read of the voyages of other people. I sit in my armchair and travel."

"I'm afraid you don't get very far, ma'am," said Silas, with a humorous expression.

"I have been to Africa with Livingstone, to the Arctic Regions with Franklin," she said sternly.

"That's what I call a cheap trip," said Mr. Brett, unabashed.

He walked across the kitchen garden to Honeycott with his wife; following Charlotte, who led the way with Zoe's arm tucked comfortably beneath her own.

"You will see there will be nobody invited for me—there never is," said Miss Fish, in a mournful whisper to her friend. "Not even Percy Hortopp; for Kitty has taken a most ridiculous prejudice against him, simply because Conrade does not happen to like him. You will see, I shall have to sit next to your father as usual."

But even Charlotte's melancholy could not withstand the cheerfulness of the guests at the Vicomte's tea-party.

Old Patrick himself was as gay as ever. From time to time he laughed aloud when he thought of the little mine in Spain; and of the responsibility of his riches, which he had now transferred to the back of Conrade, who looked strong and self-confident enough not to be at all incommoded with the burden; any more than Kitty's blitheness was overshadowed by reflections upon her new importance as the lady of the manor of Southerleigh, and the owner of her father's house.

The rays of the low afternoon sun turned her bright hair to a halo round her lovely face as she sat beside her grandfather, a pretty embodiment of youth and health and love and happiness.

Rosaleen, on the other side of the Vicomte's creaking wicker-chair, was perhaps even happier than Kitty, though she was so much quieter.

Iron Brett was almost as silent as she, but his grey eyes

spoke to her whenever she looked at him, and the restful certainty of complete understanding and perfect companionship was theirs.

"The afternoons grow chilly, and these children, who love to be out-of-doors in the thinnest of clothing, must not linger after the sun has set," said the anxious Vicomte, prudent in the midst of gaiety.

He smiled upon his little ones, and the companions of their childhood; and upon old Silas, who was as the friend of his youth grown old, so exactly did he resemble his brother John.

Zoe sat next to Odo, but her hand was clasped in her father's; and, as Charlotte had mournfully predicted, she sat next to Mr. Silas.

But her good-humour was completely restored when Iron Brett, who had remarked her depression, suggested that as the newly married couple owed their present happiness to Miss Fish, who had been chiefly instrumental in bringing them together, she was the most suitable person to propose their health.

Charlotte was nothing loth to undertake the task; she was easily pleased by the smallest attention, and she forgot instantly that she had ever expressed disapproval of the clandestine marriage, in her pleasure at being asked to honour it by a toast of her own proposition.

Her speech was the more fluent because Charlotte never paused to consider her words nor to choose her language.

"Mr. Brett thinks it is me who ought to make a speech and propose the healths of Odo and Zoe," she said, rising with great dignity, "for it was me, after all, who brought the whole party together, and me who gave you all the opportunity of growing better acquainted, which has led to three of us," said Charlotte, with the ghost of a sigh, "becoming engaged. I wish you all health and happiness,

and though I am no longer the owner of Southerleigh, I hope you won't forget me; for I shall not consider myself in any way tied down to stop in Plymouth all the year round. And though Zoe and Kitty will be next-door neighbours, so to speak, I am sure neither of them can ever deny that I have a prior claim on both their friendships, and on Rosaleen's too, since I knew them all long before they ever knew each other. I now propose the good healths of everybody here, who either has been married, or ever will be," said Charlotte, with a brilliant effort of imagination, for thus she felt that she might reasonably be included with the rest.

"We will never forget you, Charlotte," cried Kitty, "and you must come back to Southerleigh very soon and stay with me; for Mr. Brett has promised to bring Rosaleen back from America directly he has shown her to his father,—so that we can all spend Christmas together with *bon papa*."

As the Vicomte's guests took their leave, and went away through the green door into the kitchen garden talking and laughing together, the glory faded from the grassy hills, which rose behind the thatched roof of Honeycott, crowned with golden gorse and ruddy bracken; the copper glint vanished from the reddening beeches, and the glow from the mellow crimson fruit upon the orchard boughs.

In other words, the sun set behind the woods, and left the autumn world to the grey chill of the swift-rising mists of evening.

The Vicomte filled himself a bumper of the *Madère sec*, and drank it, standing alone at the table.

"*À la mémoire de ma jeunesse!*" said old Patrick,—and reversed the glass.

THE END

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